

# The Centrality of Faith

*God's Plan of Redemption*

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**Bible Text:** John 3:1-21

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## **Faith Church**

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Well, how many would say this morning that you like solving challenging problems? Are you that kind of a person? Maybe you really enjoy reading mystery novels so you can try to figure out who committed the crime. Perhaps the first thing you turn to in the paper in the morning is the crossword puzzle so you can test your wits. You may be the person at work who actually likes being given the challenging assignment, because it stretches your ability to clarify the exact nature of the problem and then bring creative and effective solutions to the table. Whatever it is, in one way or another, many of us would say that we enjoy a good challenge. Good.

Now try this one on for size. Suppose you were the one in the charge of planning the process for the redemption of mankind. How would you have designed that solution? I assume we all understand that to be a significant challenge, because on the one hand we have a God who is completely holy. And who would want a God who is anything other than completely holy, which means he is completely separated from sin, completely unable to sin and completely unable to have a relationship with anything that is sinful in any way. And, on the other hand, there is people like you and me who take the sin like, well, like ducks on a pond, huh? I don't think any of us would want to argue about that this morning especially on a holiday where many of you have your family members sitting right around you. Some of you even have momma with you today for Easter. Why don't you reach over to her right now and ask, "Mom, did I ever sin?" See how well that conversation goes.

Well, we all know that if we are willing to be honest about what is going on inside, we know that our sin it separates us from God, huh? There is an emptiness that can't be satisfied by material things or by activity or business or booze or drugs or whatever we attempt to use. In fact, the prophet Isaiah said it like this. Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. There it is. And your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Saint Augustine said it this way in his *Confessions*. "You have made us for yourself, oh Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

And so let's say it is your job to design the process of reconciliation between God and man. How would you do it? There is actually several options when you think about it. You could proclaim, look, there is no solution. It is like arriving at the airport after they have closed the airplane doors. You can beg and you can argue all you want, but in most cases there is no way they are opening that door. You may even know some people like that. It is almost like they enjoy saying no. They enjoy shaking their head when you have a need or you have a request. So when it comes to the redemption of mankind that option sounds like, look, you messed up. And there is no solution.

Is that the way you would have designed it?

Here is another solution. Well, make them earn it. People can be reconciled to God, but only if they do enough good things. And so the plan is now we are going to grade on a curve. The standard isn't holiness anymore, but we are going to establish some arbitrary number of good deeds that a person has to perform in their lifetime in order to earn eternal life on their own.

What some people like about that plan is the belief that it would actually encourage human beings to behave and living in fear that if they don't get what they want, if they don't get with it, they might not measure up. By the way, that is what the average person believes is God's plan for redemption and everlasting life. They believe that God is going to have some sort of heavenly scales and someday when they die he is going to weigh up all of their good and then he is going to weigh out all of their bad and you know how the argument goes from there, right? And I will have more good than bad, because, after all, I have tried to live a good life. I have tried to be a good person. I have tried to give, blah, blah, blah.

Have you ever heard anybody go down that particular trail and say they would probably have more bad than good? Well, that is the beauty of grading on a curve. Everybody wants to be on the good side of the curve. Is that God's plan? Would it be that way if you designed it?

How about this? How about, well, just keep them guessing then? Maybe the best plan is to remove all security from the equation. So you never let a person know until the final moment whether they really have a genuine relationship with the Lord. And make eternal life the ultimate carrot on the stick. Is that the way God planned the process to work?

Or let's add this. What about taking away as soon as the person messes up. So we are going to make an example out of some people so everybody else will live in cowering fear. Make reconciliation with God something that can easily and instantly be lost.

See, this planning for the reconciliation of man, it can take a lot of twists and turns, couldn't it?

Here is one more idea. Let's make it so complicated that practically no one could ever understand it. And isn't that the definition of a great solution in the minds of some people? So following that thinking the good news is there actually is a way for you to have a personal relationship with the Lord, to have a meaningful relationship with him in hear and now and to have assurance of eternal life when you die. That is the good news. The bad news is the process is so complicated you would have to be a genius to understand it.

Well, would any of that describe God's plan for redemption, that there is no solution or that you have to earn it or that you will never know if you have it or that it can easily be lost or that it is impossible to understand? Those are very important questions. And God's Word gives clear and compelling answers.

With that in mind, open your Bible this morning, please, to John chapter three, the gospel of John chapter three. And if you don't have a Bible with you, just pull out that one from under the chair in front of you and turn to the back section, to the New Testament to page 72. This isn't musings from Steve about answers to that question. Who cares? I wouldn't have gotten up for that. How about you? The question is: What does the Word of God say about that very matter?

Our church's theme this year is planning to grow. And we have been having a great time thinking about that theme from all sorts of perspectives and last week our pastoral staff, in my absence, began a brand new series entitled, "God's Plan for Redemption." This is just a subset of our theme, planning to grow. We are now talking about God's plan for redemption.

If you are looking for a big word, it is the doctrine of soteriology or the doctrine of salvation. And without a doubt, it is one of the most delightful topics we could possibly study together. And one principle that is going to come shining through Sunday after Sunday is that the way God planned this process and the way we would have planned it is dramatically different. What God's Word says about salvation is delightfully surprising at practically every turn. And maybe the fact that it is so surprising shouldn't be so surprising. After all, here is what God said to us in Isaiah 55:8.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts."<sup>1</sup>

And in case that hasn't dawned on you, friend, that is not a compliment, ok?

'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth...'<sup>2</sup>

You kind of want a heaven like that, don't you? The heavens are higher than the earth, someplace where it doesn't snow 10 inches in March, for crying out loud. The heavens are higher. It didn't snow that badly in Florida, by the way, but I don't want to rub that in.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 55:8.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts."<sup>3</sup>

Well, let's see what we can learn, then, from John three that confirms how surprising all of this is to people like you and people like me and people like a man named Nicodemus. I am in John chapter three beginning in verse one.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus \*said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. "If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."<sup>4</sup>

We are talking this morning about the centrality of faith. See, that is an essential aspect of God's plan for redemption. It is not a matter of making you earn it or keeping you

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 55:9.

<sup>4</sup> John 3:1-21.

guessing or taking it away from you as son as you messed up or making it so complicated that you could never understand it. No, the focus is on what you choose to believe, the centrality of faith. With the time we have remaining let's break down one of the best known verses in the entire Bible and find four reasons to exercise biblical faith.

It starts right here, friends. Faith is the response to God's love. Now there are all sorts of ways that Jesus could have directed this conversation with Nicodemus, but what he wanted this religious leader to try to comprehend was for God so loved the world.

Now tell me. You have to think about this contextually. What is it that would have knocked this Pharisee's socks right off of his body. It was the aspect of a love that was universal. See, Nicodemus comes by the cover of darkness, because he has been intrigued by what he has been hearing and what he has been seeing and he says, we, meaning himself and some of the other Jewish religious leaders. "Hey, rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." That was a powerful statement for someone like Nicodemus to make. "We believe that you have come from God," which, to them, would have mean, "And that is great news. Not to everybody, but to us, to our Jewish nation, because now we are going to be vindicated because of our ethnic heritage, because of our adherence to all of our rules and regulations which we believe have placed us in a favored position of earning our way to heaven. And so the fact that you have come from God is great news to the children of Israel and the children of Israel alone.

That is why the prophet Amos had warned them long before, hundreds of years before this conversation took place:

Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, For what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you? It will be darkness and not light; As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall And a snake bites him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, Even gloom with no brightness in it?<sup>5</sup>

See, Amos, hundreds of years before John three occurred was warning them. It is not going to have the impact that you expect. But like many of the prophet's messages apparently that one went right on by, so Jesus says to Nicodemus, "For God so loves who? God so loves the world." Not just a particular ethnic group, not a particular religious group, not any kind of group. His love for mankind, at least in certain ways and to certain degrees is universal. That is why if you are here this morning and you say, "You know, I don't think God loves me," friend, on the authority of Scripture that is incorrect. And there is nothing that you could put on the table about your past or present that would cause me to change that view. It couldn't be any plainer. God so loved the world.

Now there will be aspects of this series that are going to be plenty challenging to understand. In fact, in a couple of weeks it is my assignment that I gave myself to preach

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<sup>5</sup> Amos 5:20.

on the doctrine of election from the Word of God. That is going to stretch us for sure. So there are aspects of what the Word of God says on every subject that stretches our mind. Because, after all, his ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. There is aspects of this that are challenging for sure. But there is plenty of aspects of the gospel that are quite simple, quite plain. God so loved the world. So unless you are from a different galaxy you qualify. And, technically, I think you would qualify even if you were from a different galaxy.

And, by the way, that is the kind of God that people like you and I should want to believe in, huh? A God who loves like that, the centrality of faith.

It is also a love that is undeserved. See, someone like Nicodemus was stumped by the notion that he would have to be born again. His faith was in his own birthright already. His faith was in his ethnic heritage. His faith was in his own goodness, his own ability to save himself. And, by the way, I am sure that there will be people who attend this service today who believe exactly the same thing. I am already going to heaven. I am good enough on my own. After all, my granny used to teach me we are all God's children. I love your granny, but shew as wrong on that point. She could not have been more wrong theologically if she tried. The Word of God says you were born on the wrong side of the tracks.

You say, "You don't even know me."

I know the Scripture. I know it pretty well. And the Bible says these kinds of things about people like you and me, that we were dead in trespasses and sins and we were disobedient to God and we were alienated. You remember now this? For God so loved the world, this kind of world, alienated from God. We were unloving toward him. We were on the path to destruction. We had fallen short of his glory. And, friend, just in case you are wondering. That is an abbreviated list for sake of time.

I hope no one here would say, "Well, of course, God would love me. He ought to in light of how wonderful a person I am. In fact, he is pretty lucky to have me now that I think of it."

Listen, the day you stop being surprised that God loves you is a very sad and dangerous day. And when we take an honest inventory of the way we sometimes speak and the way we sometimes act and the way we sometimes think, a word that ought to be very prominent in this discussion is anyway. There are just anyway. God loves me anyway. Not because of who I am, but in spite of what he knows about my past and what he knows about my present and what he knows about my future.

This part of the conversation should have reminded Nicodemus of a very important passage from his own Old Testament where God had told his people in Deuteronomy seven:

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

Friend, the Lord's love for you doesn't prove anything about you. It proves everything about him. And what Scripture wants us to understand is that that kind of unexpected and that kind of universal, that kind of undeserved love it can empower and motivate us to love God and to live for him like no fear or doubt based approach ever could. That is why fundamentally it is a love that is life transforming.

You say, "Well, how would I know if I understood this aspect of the gospel?"

It would come out in the way you live.

You say, "Like what?"

Like this, 2 Corinthians 5:14.

"For the love of Christ controls us."<sup>7</sup>

See, there it is. That is what guides us.

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.<sup>8</sup>

See, if we had some sort of machine up here today that could separate your past week into those same categories, that would be interesting. If we poured all of your thoughts this week, all of your words this week, all of your actions into this separating device and it would divide it in those two categories listed in that passage, the times when we were just living for ourselves or times when we were living for him who died and rose again on our behalf. We could also really quickly, whether we are truly been impacted by the love of God, because we choose, not out of fear, not out of uncertainty, because of love back. We choose to live for him.

1 John 4:19:

"We love, because He first loved us."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 7:7.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 4:19.

And, friend, that can be such a delightful thing when it is actually happening, when a person has been impacted by this aspect of John 3:16, for God so loved the world. God chose to love me like that. I want to in response to his grace be loving toward him and loving toward those the Lord has placed around me. It has changed my life. It has made a difference.

For example, take a husband or a father who has come to the conclusion that my life is not about me and this family doesn't exist certainly to serve and please me. The most important person in this family is not me. The most important person in this family is Jesus. And, as a result of his love for Christ, he chooses to love his wife and he chooses to love his children. And you can tell. It is not just some yak that comes out on Easter Sunday. You can tell the difference that Christ has made in his life. And then you have his wife, his honey. And she, too, has decided, listen, the marriage is not about me. It is not about my desires. It is not about my... it is about Jesus. The most important person in this marriage is the one who is unseen. And therefore I am going to choose to love my husband even when he is not particularly lovable. Anybody can be happy on a holiday. Anybody can love when the person is being lovable. They test of love is when the person is being unloving like God loved us.

And then when you get young people who get that in their hearts early and often, this family doesn't exist for me. This family exists, I exist in order to love God. That is why I am so loving to my parents, whether I feel like it or not.

See, what were we singing a minute ago? I am not going to live by what I feel. You don't want me to break out into song, do you? That would ruin the holiday for sure. Yeah, no. And when that is happening in a family it is a marvelous thing. You see, faith is the response to God's love. And you don't live that way unless you have chosen to believe. These persons who served in the passion play, thank God for them. I had the privilege of being with them in the last presentation yesterday evening. Some of them have been doing that for a long time. This church has been having dramatic presentations at Easter for a long time in various forms. And some of those persons have been doing them every year. And so today they are tired because they have been serving God. Why? Because the love of God has impacted their life and the love of God has changed their life so much that they want to show their love for God and others by sharing that love with those from our community in hopes that others will place their faith and trust in Christ.

See, faith is a response to the love of God.

Secondly, faith is amazed at love's sacrifice.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.”<sup>10</sup>

See, that is one of the great things about biblical love.

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<sup>10</sup> John 3:16.



And you say, “Well, I am not sure I feel that God loves me.”

It is not a matter of feeling fundamentally. It is a matter of what God chose to do. It is fundamentally a choice to give. God so loved the world that he gave. It is the same emphasis as we see in Galatians 2:20.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."<sup>11</sup>

That is what love is. That is why, by the way, husbands are commanded to love our wives in the exact same way.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”<sup>12</sup>

And if you would say, “Well, pastor Viars, I am single.”

We are glad that you are part of our church family. We are glad you are here. Find someone that you can show sacrificial love to in your life. But from the perspective of an individual who is married, I would ask you this morning. Have you allowed the gospel to impact the way you function in your home? And some evangelicals are so wound up right now about other people in our culture who maybe they don't think should marry, blah, blah, blah... Listen, our first concern should not be other people in our culture and whether or not they can marry. Our first concern ought to be the quality of heterosexual marriages within the church. Judgment begins at the household of God and most of us men are so selfish that we have plenty of time to focus on our own selfishness and our own lack of love and our need to get with it that we don't have a whole lot of time left over to worry about other people ought to marry. And many wives inside the church are such drama queens and are so into their pity parties and blah, blah, blah and are so focused on what they are not getting. And what God would want them to do on Easter Sunday is to think about the great love that God has had for us and therefore the love that we can choose, not feel, choose to have for those in our life. And when you are putting your focus on that, you don't have a whole lot of time to argue about things in our culture. Let's be a bright light of what a godly, growing, heterosexual marriage would look like and let God do the rest with that kind of testimony.

The point is: It is not primarily a matter of how you feel. It is a matter of choosing to sacrifice yourself and meet the needs of other people in your life. That is what biblical love is. That is the way God choose to love us.

Now you might wonder, what is this only begotten Son thing?

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<sup>11</sup> Galatians 2:20.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 5:25.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.”<sup>13</sup>

What is that all about? Well, in a nutshell it is saying that God’s sacrifice is unique. And never before and never again would there be a need for the second person of the trinity to become a man. And because he was the perfect Son of God he only had to be offered once. That is why John had previously said:

“And the Word became flesh...”<sup>14</sup>

That is why what Titus said earlier, that was so right on. You can’t have Easter without having Christmas.

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.”<sup>15</sup>

Only begotten is the Greek phrase μονογενης (mon-og-en-ace’). It means unique.

“...the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>16</sup>

In other words, possessing the essential elements of deity. This is why a few verses later John says:

“No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.”<sup>17</sup>

And eventually there is no question about what all that meant when Jesus said in John 10:30:

“I and the Father are one.”<sup>18</sup>

A clear claim to deity.

“I and the Father are one.”<sup>19</sup>

And we know that the people on that day understood Christ’s claim to be God, because what did they do next? They picked up stones again to stone him. Here is the point. God’s gift was unique. There was only one begotten Son and the Father still gave him to die in the place of our sin, because of his great love for the world.

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<sup>13</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>14</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> John 1:18.

<sup>18</sup> John 10:30.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

BC often has some great cartoons, especially around Easter. And here is one. I hate the term Good Friday. Why? Well, my Lord was hanged on a tree that day. Well, if you were going to be hanged on that day and he volunteered to take your place, how would you feel? Good. Have a nice day.

And that is exactly right, because that is a beautiful picture of the substitutionary atonement, the substitutionary death of Christ. And, friends, here is what is amazing. That was always part of the plan. Do we understand that? That was always part of the plan. From the moment God decided that human beings would have the freedom to choose whether they would obey his Word or rebel against him, God's love began planning the sacrifice for mankind's sin.

That was actually alluded to in this text, did you notice it? In verse 14:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.<sup>20</sup>

Moses, that was nearly 3500 years ago. See, not only has God been planning to give his only begotten Son for those who were undeserving of his love, he has been planning that for a long, long time. In fact, it goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden where God said to Satan after the fall of man, "And I will put enmity between you, Satan, and the woman and between your seed and her seed." Now that would have gotten his attention big time. That is the first reference in the Bible to the Messiah and we are not even out of the third chapter of Genesis.

"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed."<sup>21</sup>

And here is what is going to happen. He, Satan, the Messiah one day is going to bruise you on the head, bring the worst thing that you can bring to mankind, death, and Jesus is going to destroy it. He is going to bruise you on the head, but you shall at the cross bruise him on the heel.

No wonder the apostle Paul would say that this sacrifice is indescribable.

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"<sup>22</sup>

Friend, aren't you glad that God was the one in charge of making the plan for redemption? Not making you earn it, not keeping you guessing, not taking it away from you as soon as you messed up, not making it so complicated you could never understand it.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John 3:14-15

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 3:15.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 9:15.

His indescribable gift.

Well, where does that leave us? It means that faith now is a choice to believe God's message.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him..."<sup>24</sup>

You see, that is what it comes down to. What do you believe about God in your relationship to him? Have you come to the conclusion of believing that you really need a second birth? And let's face it. Some people in our culture have a great difficulty with that, because it requires a level of humility. It requires acknowledging something about one's self that you may not want to admit, that you are sinful and you cannot save yourself. You are not coming to God with all your works. You are coming to God in repentance. You are coming to God acknowledging something about your life, that you have sinned, you have fallen short and the only way you can be separated to him is by believing in, placing your faith and trust in what Jesus Christ did on the cross for you.

I saw a sign this week that kind of got me fired up, if you can imagine that, down in Florida. It was a sign from a church and the sign had a picture of the pass, a huge billboard and then a picture of the church in the background. And the words on the sign were, "It is all forgiven."

Friend, I have to love you enough to tell you it is not all forgiven. It is all forgivable. If you want to come to God his way, it is all forgivable. But there is a huge difference between it is all forgiven and it is all forgivable. John 3:16 is a very simple verse, but it has a clear condition.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes..."<sup>25</sup>

That is the question before the house. Has there ever been a definite time in your life where you have acknowledged your need and then come to Christ in repentance and faith? And I realize that is not a particularly positive message, but it is the truth.

I had the privilege and the responsibility a couple of weeks ago to do Kathy Wilson's funeral, a 53 year old employee up at a public school north of here who was a member of our church for many years. She and her husband Mike came to know the Lord through counseling and had been a faithful part of our church now for quite a few years. And I was told that they had cancelled school the day of Kath's funeral so there would be many, presumably there who were not normally in a church, were not normally under the teaching of the Word of God. And I had the privilege and the responsibility of doing that

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<sup>23</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

funeral. That is a challenging situation for sure. And I made a promise long ago to the Lord, that I would never do a funeral and preach people into heaven if they were not, in fact, going there. I believe giving people false hope is a terrible way to handle any grieving situation. I just don't believe in that.

And so you have the difficulty of you don't want to be harsh. You don't want to be mean, because people are grieving, that they miss their friend. And I understand that. There is the sting of death. They were also thinking about their own death. And the easy thing would just be to preach everybody into heaven. That would be the easy thing today. But it wouldn't be true.

So here is the text I selected for that message, Titus 3:3.

“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.”<sup>26</sup>

You might say, “I bet that went over well.”

It is true. That is our unsaved condition. And some of you, if you know your Bible say, “Well, thank God that is not where it ends.” You are right, because the text goes on to say:

But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.<sup>27</sup>

And, friends, you cannot give to the latter part of that passage without acknowledging the truth of the former. That means we have to make a concrete decision at a specific point in time. Whosoever believes on him.

Now let's clarify that quickly. I have persons say to me from time to time, “Well, I believe in God. What are you on my case about? I believe in God.”

Well, congratulations. You have now reached the level of spirituality equivalent to the devil. Do you realize the Scripture is really clear? The devil believes. In fact, I would suggest the devil believes more than most of us in the existence of God. The question isn't: Do I believe there was a God or do I believe that Jesus even died on the cross or resurrected from the dead? That is not the issue. I believe in Communism. If that is to say I believe that Communism exists. But I am not a Communist in the sense that I have embraced that for my own. That is the question. Has there ever been a definite time in your life where you have acknowledged your need and then you have placed your faith

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<sup>26</sup> Titus 3:3.

<sup>27</sup> Titus 3:4-7.

and trust in Christ as your only hope of eternity. You have said, “I need a Savior and I need a Lord.”

Friend, do you know that you know that you are on your way to heaven? You can. John said it this way.

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.”<sup>28</sup>

There is also the matter of understanding the consequences of choosing not to believe. I read that entire text on purpose, because many people know John 3:16. They don’t know John 3:18.

“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed.”<sup>29</sup>

It is the centrality of faith. Friend, there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned. My wife Chris, for several years, worked at a public school as a special aid or special needs aid. She would go around in the classroom and help some of the kids who were struggling and she had one little guy who was taking a test and he had done the front page of the test, but he had failed to recognize there were questions on the back. And so Chris asked him a question, kind of an obvious question. Well, don’t you want to turn it over and to the questions on the back?

He said, “No, I am good.”

He was anything but good, huh? I fear for men and women who might hear this message today who have never trusted Christ and who will walk away and say, “No, I am good.”

Well, faith results in incredible promises.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”<sup>30</sup>

Friend, that is the essence of the plan, the fact that not only has he planned for our redemption, but he is planning a place for us. We have had a number of people in our church family who have lost loved ones recently and many of those knew the Lord which means that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Think about the members of this Church who over the last year since last Easter have died. What are they doing today? They are celebrating the resurrected Savior personally.

My family and I have been to Tarpon Springs. I was teaching a class on biblical counseling with a bunch of freshmen. Tarpon Springs, that is a really nice place. It didn’t

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<sup>28</sup> 1 John 5:13.

<sup>29</sup> John 3:18.

<sup>30</sup> John 3:16.

snow there a lick all week, not a lick. And there is one area of Tarpon Springs by where we stay where you drive in around this beautiful curve and there is a gorgeous bay surrounded by palm trees, beautiful houses. I know what I was going to be speaking on this week and I thought, you know, that is a gorgeous spot, for sure. But it is sin cursed man doing things in a sin cursed world and yet it is that beautiful.

Think about what heaven is going to be like, a place that God has prepared for us. And, friend, if you have chosen to believe, if you can sing with that song, “I believe, I believe, I believe,” in the sense that you have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, then on the promise of the Scripture, God’s plan for you is everlasting life.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.