

INTRODUCTION

In the last message, we focused on one part of John 3:16, "For God so loved." I shared about God's love, the greatest force in the universe. Because John 3:16 is such a strategic Bible truth, I'm not ready to leave it yet.

This is going to be a different kind message today from my usual style. I'm going to tell you the whole story of the Gospel in one message. I debated with myself about even giving you an outline to fill in just so I could tell the story. But as I started planning the message, the story divided itself into seven short chapters.

Let's look again at John 3:16. Because many of us memorized it in the good old King James, let's read it together: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16 NKJV)

I believe that John 3:16 is the expression of the turning point of human history. Of course, you'll never hear that in a history class in a secular university. But we believe that all of history really is His Story. God is involved in moving human history toward His desired conclusion, and nothing we can do will change His plans.

I've been preaching God's Word for forty-eight years, but I've never truly summarized the entire Gospel story in one message. So here we go.

Chapter 1. God made you to have a loving relationship with Him.

Have you ever wondered why you exist? God made you so He could relate to you as a loving father relates to a child. During Creation, God wanted to put a part of Himself on earth. So, God made us in His image, and breathed into us the breath of life. He gave us a spirit, which makes us different from all the other creatures. He gave us the capacity to know Him. And the only way to have real peace and purpose in life is through a loving relationship with our Creator. The whole reason for the creation of the universe was so God could have a parent/child relationship with human beings.

God made Adam and Eve and placed them in a beautiful garden. He told them to enjoy all the fruits of the garden except one tree. We read in Genesis 3 that God was walking in the garden looking for Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. God walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day.

The reason God created Adam and Eve was so He could have a relationship with them. Can you imagine what it must have been like for them to walk with the Lord in the cool of the day? They were naked, but they didn't experience any shame. We won't know until we get to Heaven, but they might have walked and talked with God for thousands of years.

Last week at WEBS, we looked at the life of Enoch, the first prophet. He lived 5,000 years ago. The Bible says that "Enoch walked with God." He was seven generations from Adam, but he was

the first person since Adam that the Bible says walked with God. That means Enoch had an intimate loving relationship with his Creator. The prophet Micah shows what is good and what God requires of us—to act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8 NIV)

God's purpose for me and you hasn't changed. He wants us to be able to walk with Him in a personal relationship. John 3:16 tells us that when we trust Jesus we receive eternal life. Eternal life is not referred to a time period, like forever, It is a reference to a quality of life that we experience when we trust Jesus. We come to KNOW God in a personal way through Jesus.

We know what the definition of eternal life is, because Jesus gave it to us. On the night before He was crucified, Jesus prayed, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ." (John 17:3 CSB) Let me say again, that religion will never save you, it takes a relationship. Religion is man's search for God. Christianity is God's search to have a loving relationship with every single human being who has ever walked on planet earth.

Chapter 2. Our default reaction is to resist this relationship.

Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the evening. But God gave them the ability to choose to love Him. They faced a choice. Would they maintain their intimacy with God and trust Him to tell them what was good or evil? That was the path of no shame. Or would they choose to reject God and find out for themselves what was good and evil? That was the path to shame.

They weren't robots programmed to love God and neither are we. So, after Eve was tempted by the serpent, she and Adam rejected God's love and did the one thing He told them not to do. God warned them that the day they ate of the tree, they would die. They disobeyed God: They believed the lie of the devil who whispered, "You don't need God. You can be god yourself."

So they resisted God's love and ate the fruit. But they didn't die that day in their bodies. Instead they died in their spirits. They lost that sense of intimacy with God. The loving relationship was broken. When God came looking for them, they hid from Him. And we've been hiding from God ever since.

The Bible confirms this in many passages, but perhaps it most clearly stated in Psalm 53, "God looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one." (Psalm 53:2-3 CSB)

Our default response is to resist getting close to this God. Part of it is because people have such a convoluted opinion about God; most of them think of Him either as some white-haired grandfather like Michelangelo painted or some stern disciplinarian who is just waiting to catch us messing up. And we all mess up. And people think God is angry at them.

The best way I can make a parallel is to talk about the behavior of teenagers toward their parents. How many of you have ever raised teenagers, or are raising teenagers right now? Something happens during puberty that changes the nature of our relationships. I can remember when my two daughters were little kids they would come running up to me when I got home. "Daddy, daddy! It's so good to see you!" And they would jump up into my arms.

But when they became teenagers, they weren't bad but there was a period of time when they wanted to hide away in their rooms—all teens do that. There is a period of time when teenagers think their parents are as dumb as a rock. My wife says grandkids are God's reward for not killing your children when they are teenagers.

I heard about one dad who punished his teenager for disobedience. He took away some phone or screen time. And he tells about going into the bedroom and confronting his daughter and saying, "Honey, even though I had to punish you, I want you to know that I still love you." And she turned to him and said, "Yes, you always say that, and want you to know that it is SOOO annoying!"

In our sinful condition, we are like spiritual teenagers. We don't want to run into the arms of God. We feel safer hiding away in the bedroom of our self-centeredness.

Chapter 3. The Bible tells the story of God's repeated attempts to restore this broken relationship.

Thank God that He didn't give up on us. Wickedness became so bad that God had to cleanse the earth with a flood, but even in that judgment He had a love relationship with Noah and His family. Then God established a relationship with another couple named Abraham and Sarah. The Bible calls Abraham a "friend of God." God chose Abe and Sarah to be the parents of an entire nation. And this nation was to be a blessing to all the other people of the earth by reflecting God's loving, moral nature.

But through the centuries it was a rocky relationship and the Israelites behaved like spoiled teenagers. God gave them the Ten Commandments and they broke every one of them. God gave them a land of their own with a beach front view of the Mediterranean, and they ruined it by going after all the pagan gods of the Gentile nations.

Throughout all these times of adolescent rebellion, God repeatedly sent prophets to call them back to Him. Sometimes they returned to God and He blessed them. Under David and Solomon they were the mightiest world power of the ancient world. But most of the time they ignored the prophets and even killed them. Their relationship with God spiraled downward until the nation was ultimately destroyed and sent into exile. God brought them back, but they were only a shadow of their previous glory.

But from the very beginning, God had a better plan. He promised He would send a King who would be more a political King. He would be someone who would deliver people from their sins.

So the Old Testament end with these promises of a King unfulfilled. But that wasn't the end of the story. It was just the beginning.

Chapter 4. God's greatest attempt to restore our relationship was to send His Own Son.

That's what John 3:16 is all about. It is the turning point of history. The Bible says, "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 CSB)

God sent Jesus to prove that a restored relationship with Him is what He most wants. But it also proves that a restored relationship with our Father is what we most need.

We live in a world that is full of problems. There is hatred, violence, and division in our nation, and around the globe. But all of the problems of the world, "small p" stem from the major Problem, "capital P," that we have a broken relationship with God.

You say, "That's over-simplification." No it's not. Let me use a human analogy. Social science has spent millions of dollars studying the problems of our culture over the past fifty years. And they are united in saying that the biggest problem affecting our culture is the long-term negative effects on a person's life when a dad isn't present. Nothing is more damaging than an absentee, negligent or abusive father. Social science has proven that this one problem has a cascading effect on all these other problems but they all go back to the source, a broken or bad relationship with a dad.

Social science has proven what we knew instinctively. That we don't function well when our relationship with our dad is broken. And if that's how it is with our human fathers, how much more important is with our relationship with our Heavenly Father?

Here's the difference though. When a human relationship with our dad is messed up, it usually the dad's fault. It's the dad who isn't around. But in the case of our broken relationship with God, we're the ones who moved out. God has done so much over and over again to restore our relationship, and we keep rejecting Him. Why did God send His Son? Because He loves us.

Chapter 5. Our most desperate attempt to resist God was to kill His Son.

Yet, when God sent Jesus, humanity didn't run to Him and embrace Him. We killed Him. And this isn't any surprise. It goes back to Adam and Eve hiding from God. It's an escalating story of God trying harder and harder, and us resisting more and more until we nailed Him to a cross. Can you feel the hammer in your hand? Can you feel the shock and vibration as you drove those nails into the hands of feet of God? No thank you. We're going in our room and we're going to slam the door shut on your offer of love.

So sending Jesus was God's most desperate attempt to love us. And when we killed Jesus it was our most desperate attempt to resist Him. It's like we're saying, "God, we don't want you. What part of that do you not understand?"

Now lest you feel sorry for God, don't. He knew all of this would happen. Jesus was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. Never at one time in this entire story did God say, "Oops." Or "Huh. I wasn't expecting that."

And if that's where the story ended, with us killing God it would be a pretty sad story. But we know the story doesn't end there.

Chapter 6. The Resurrection is God's promise that He will NEVER stop pursuing a loving relationship with us.

We all know that the cross wasn't the end of the story. God raised Him from the dead. It was God's way of saying, "Look. It doesn't matter how many rounds you want to go, but I'm going to win in the end. Because I'm bigger and stronger. Do your worst. I can take it."

The reason the Bible is such a long book is because God never gave up on us. It is the story of His repeated efforts to restore this loving relationship that our sin had broken. Otherwise the Bible could have been a short book. God created human beings because He wanted to love them. They didn't love Him back. The end. But instead He kept trying and wouldn't give up—and He won't give up on you.

Teens are sullen, but toddlers pitch tantrums. Our resistance is childish too. I heard one dad tell the story of how his four-year-old had a temper tantrum in Walmart because the dad refused to buy him a toy. As the boy was screaming, the dad picked him up in his arms and the kid started hitting his dad on the chest with his little fists saying, "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you." And the dad said he just kept holding his son and absorbed the blows, which didn't really hurt Him physically. He said, "I didn't like it. But I could take it, because I was bigger than him." And when he had finished, I said, "Are you finished? I'm still here, and I love you." Even though our repeated rebellion against God is like a child hitting his father, our God is able to take it and He's always still there waiting for us to move to restore our broken relationship.

Chapter 7. When you stop resisting God, He welcomes you home as a loving Father.

Jesus summarized the whole Gospel by cramming it into one of his parables. It is often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But we shouldn't call it that, because the focus isn't on the rebellious son. It should be called the Parable of the Loving Father. Based upon what we've talking about in this message, listen to it as the story of the Gospel.

It's a story with two main characters, a father and a younger son. The younger son was probably about eighteen or nineteen. He said, "Dad, when you die I'm going to get some of your money. But I don't want to wait. So why don't you just pay me now? Because as I've planned my future, it doesn't include you. I don't want to stay on this farm. I want to get out of here. But I

can't leave now because I don't have any money. And I don't want to wait around until you die." He was saying, "Do you know what would be great? If I could have your money without having you."

And so, in real life, the dad would have probably slapped him. But in the story he says, "Well, I don't want to keep you here against your will. So I guess I could give you your money now." The son says, "Thanks, Dad. That would be great. But I guess this is goodbye. I probably won't see you again."

The dad says, "Well I hope you have a good life and that you're happy." And at first the son is happy. He moves to the big city with his pockets full of cash so he can do what he wants to do.

Back home he knew his dad loved him, but he didn't feel good around his dad. So much like Adam and Eve in the garden, He hid from His dad in the bright lights and the loud music.

So he goes all out. Wine, women, and song. Sex, drugs, and rock and roll. He has a great time...until he runs out of money and about the same time he runs out of friends. Funny how that happens.

So he tries to get a job. And the only job he can get is on a pig farm outside the city. The same guy who hated the farm is now working on a farm—and nothing smells quite like a hog farm. And the farmer is basically paying him nothing. He is so hungry he wanted to eat the husks he was feeding the pigs.

Then he has an epiphany. "Wait a minute. Here I am working on a farm. My dad has a farm. The hired hands who work on my dad's farm make a lot more money than I'm making. Obviously I can't ask for my place back at the family table. I burned that bridge. But I wonder if I went back if my dad would take me back—not as a son—but hire me as a servant. Then I'll at least have enough money to buy food to eat."

So, with that plan in mind, he starts off the next day down the road back to his dad's farm. And Jesus said in Luke 15 that on the way home, he is rehearsing his speech to his dad. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be your son. Will you hire me as a farm hand?"

And Jesus tells us even though the son was a long way off, the father was looking for him. He probably looked down that same road fifty times a day. And on this day, the father recognizes him as his son.

He says, "That's my boy!" And he took off running. People didn't run in those days, it was undignified. He doesn't care. He runs all the way to his son and throws his arms around his neck and starts kissing him. Even though he had rejected his dad and smelled awful, the father kept kissing him.

The son just goes on autopilot and starts reciting his speech. "Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." And in the story, it's as if the dad doesn't even hear him. Instead he starts giving orders to the servants to put a robe on his son, and a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet, and said, "Let's kill the fatted calf. Because my boy was lost and now he's been found. He was dead and now he is alive!" And Jesus said there was a celebration. And the take-away was the same as the two previous stories of a lost lamb or a lost coin. Jesus said, "There is joy in the presence of angels over ONE sinner who repents."

I could say this relates to your life, but this IS your life. Every one of us in here is the son or the daughter who said, "God, you know what would be really great? If I could have your money without having You. And I'll take all this neat stuff you've created. I'll take all the food, the drink, the family, the art, the music. All that stuff is great. But I'm going to take it, and I'm going to live my life over here."

This is true of every one of us in the room. The only question is whether or not you've run out of money. The son didn't see his need for his father until he ran out of money. So the question, I have for you is: Have you run out of money?

Running out of money is a metaphor for checking all the boxes, having all your fun, climbing all of your ladders and realizing it doesn't make you feel the way you wanted to feel. It's coming to a place where you admit that no matter how full you pack your life, it's still empty without God. Some of you haven't run out yet, so you probably don't see the need for God. But others of you have run out metaphorically. You're spiritually bankrupt. And you may think God won't take you back and you don't deserve to be loved.

But the story of the Bible is God saying, "I don't want to hear your speech. I just want you to come home." And when you start to Him, your Loving Father runs to embrace you.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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