

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JUNE 17 - 21, 2019



IN COMMON

SERMON SERIES

June 2 - July 28

MONDAY

1 John 1:1-3, 4:7-11; John 13:34-35

As we continue our “in common” series, let’s revisit something exceptionally uncommon in our fallen world, yet commanded by Jesus to be common among believers (John 13:34): agápē love, available to and through God’s people while mysterious to the unredeemed. This love washed over me as I pondered it in awe and wonder some 24 years ago. God had been wooing me for at least the entire decade of my 30’s. I had grown aware of His call and had come to know my nagging emptiness as “God-shaped,” but still hadn’t surrendered. So, what won me over, penetrating both my heart’s hardness and my pride with it?

While driving to a meeting toward Escondido one Saturday in 1995, I dialed up a Christian talk station. Though not yet “born again,” I had become increasingly intrigued by Christianity. The radio host spoke with a woman who was sharing about her young son’s murder as an innocent bystander nearby a gang shootout years earlier. The police apprehended his shooter, whom she saw initially at his murder trial. I paid attention as the talk radio host queried her.

She noted how alone and frightened this young, teenage boy appeared during the trial, worlds apart from the bravado he likely exhibited while gang-banging. His charge was reduced to manslaughter, she conveyed without bitterness; he was sentenced accordingly. Later she felt compelled to visit him in prison and learned that he’d had no family; the gang was his surrogate kin. She visited him repeatedly and, upon his subsequent release, asked him to live at her home. He did, later becoming her adopted son.

I had to pull over to the freeway's shoulder while listening—my tears had become a safety hazard. How could this be? How can someone be so forgiving and loving? Only God could do something like this—I needed to know such a God!

As Christ followers, we have direct access to God's love. It's joyful, something to cherish. But it's not something to keep to ourselves. We are to share it, to let it radiate. Who knows? Maybe somebody like a younger me will observe it; it might be the final thing drawing them to Christ.

QUESTIONS

Why is agápē love so uncommon in our world? What role does such love play in drawing unbelievers toward Christ?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Juli McGowan-Boit, who is serving in Kenya with Living Room Ministries International, a hospice community established to compassionately honor life and offer hope in end-of-life care.

TUESDAY

Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 2:5-11; John 10:30

Ever hear, “All religions are essentially alike, teaching goodness: be kind and generous, more virtuous than not, and you’ll be rewarded after dying”? Since true Christianity is not religion, one might support this opinion’s merit. At face value and as apparently intended, however, its logic is like a woman considering a husband, concluding, “It doesn’t matter whom I marry; men are pretty similar—same equipment, comparable needs and wants. They all die eventually.”

“Religions exhort man to reach up to God and grasp hold of Him through their own efforts. [In] Christianity ... God reaches down to man (even becoming a Man to rescue us). ... Religions are systems of do’s and don’ts to appease God; whereas [true] Christianity is a relationship with God. ... Christianity [uniquely] looks to the Bible as the singular source of Truth ... [and] is based upon truly the most amazing event in all of human history—the resurrection.” (GotQuestions/org)

Other distinctions between Christianity and religions: God loves us, desiring intimate relationship (unlike Allah, Vishnu, and other eastern “gods”); and the Founder lives (unlike Mohammed, Buddha, etc.), having risen to defeat death and sin. Also unlike religions, in Christianity God the Son paid the price finally and fully, having done all that’s needed for salvation. One’s works/merit are irrelevant—a Christian’s good works are the *fruit* of having a relationship with God, not a cause of salvation; and you can *know* that you are saved, that your sins are forgiven.

What about those with a compromised view regarding the central importance of Christ’s deity: “I admire Jesus—He was a good man

and righteous teacher”? C. S. Lewis rebuked: “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher—he would either be a lunatic, or very evil. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. God ... landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form.”

Social convention says, “Don’t talk about religion.” Is that always wise, or merely “comfortable”? We can rejoice that Jesus didn’t submit to “comfort,” but suffered and died horribly for us. Is another’s salvation, then, worth your potential, momentary discomfort?

QUESTIONS

What does the statement “true Christianity is not religion” mean? What are some key distinctions between true Christianity and the world’s religions? What’s wrong with the common sentiment, “Jesus was a good man and a righteous teacher”?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Living Room’s team of 108 Kenyans to remain courageous and compassionate to daily care for the sick and dying who come to their hospices.

WEDNESDAY

1 John 1:1-3; Luke 22:55-62; Acts 2:22-41

Beyond the compelling, otherwise inexplicable evidence of the crucified Christ's empty tomb, what are some other factors reinforcing the Gospel's authenticity? Biblical accounts of Jesus' life are so improbable that they simply couldn't have been fabricated. The "criterion of embarrassment" reinforces that "the early church would hardly have gone out of its way to create or falsify historical material that embarrassed its author or weakened its position ... with opponents." (Wikipedia)

Many key factors in the Gospel would have been shameful to 1st century Jews. The Savior's genealogy included the illegitimate son (Perez) of a sexual union of a patriarch (Judah) with his daughter-in-law (Tamar), a prostitute (Rahab), a murderous adulterer (King David), an adulteress (Bathsheba), numerous wicked and ineffective kings (Rehoboam, Abijah, etc.) and Jesus' own then-unwed mother (the virgin Mary). Christ was executed like a common criminal in the most brutal, humiliating way possible. Women, considered so marginal that their testimonies were "invalid" in Jewish courts, were those who—unlike ten of the eleven living male disciples—faithfully witnessed Jesus' crucifixion, first discovered the empty tomb. and were influential both with Jesus and in the early church.

Moreover, the apostles themselves reinforce the Gospel account's credibility. All but John fearfully fled the crucifixion scene. Yet these same cowardly deserters later died willingly for their beliefs, likewise

subjecting their families to extreme persecution—no one dies readily for something they know is false. Prior to being called by Jesus, Simon “the Zealot,” a militant Israel nationalist, would have considered Levi [Matthew], the tax collector, a traitor and a bitter enemy. Yet these two became peaceable fellow disciples under Jesus’ leadership.

As well, at least seven of the twelve were formerly unrefined fishermen. Ironically, only Judas Iscariot appears to have been well-educated and politically connected. Yet these same commoners turned the world “upside down,” becoming influential orators, leaders, evangelists, and New Testament penmen.

You’ve heard the expression “Too good to be true”—many unbelievers view Christianity’s claims accordingly. Ironically, however, the related history is too checkered, embarrassing and humanly improbable to have been manmade. The “greatest story ever told” isn’t merely a story—His story is history.

QUESTIONS

How do the Bible’s “embarrassing” elements support its authenticity? How do the disciples’ changed characters and pre- and post-resurrection behavior support Christianity’s claims?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Pray for each patient who comes into the hospice, that they will feel God’s love through our service.

THURSDAY

John 14:6; Matthew 26:36-44; Isaiah 40:6-8

Yesterday we were driving on the I-215 Freeway going about 65 mph in the diamond lane. A motorcyclist zipped up from behind, swerved around us, then speedily weaved through the cars ahead. My wife commented, “That guy must have a death wish.” Within seconds, we saw things flying up ahead and traffic stopped instantly. As we inched to the right to avoid the accident scene, we looked away but saw peripherally a crumpled, motionless body splayed out on the asphalt and a wrecked motorcycle 50 yards ahead.

I silently appealed, “Lord, I pray that this young man knew You and Your salvation.” My wife and sister-in-law were quiet, likely reflecting and praying similarly. This was a shocking, sobering notice of life’s precious, fragile nature. And a reminder of Jesus’ sacrifice.

“Why?” is a common question. Among the most common “why” questions is: “Why is this happening to me?” Surveying Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, His passion [suffering] and three-time appeal to “let this cup pass,” it’s impossible to grasp what He endured. The Redeemer later died willingly (John 10:18), though sweating anguished blood there in the garden (Luke 22:44). In His humanity, did Jesus grapple with “Why?” at Gethsemane, much as we do?

Is there another way to reconciliation with God apart from Christ? John 14:6 proclaims, “No!” As does Gethsemane. The Father who is love (1 John 4:8), unwilling that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9),

subjected the Savior to unspeakable agony and humiliation. If there was another way, would the Father have put His Son through this? If there was another way, God is neither good nor loving, and the silent “No!” to Jesus’ three petitions would be cruel and mocking. But we know otherwise. God created us not out of His need, but for us to enjoy an eternal, loving relationship with Him.

Upon once hearing Jesus’ hard teaching, some of His followers grumbled and turned from Him. *“Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ... You are the Holy One of God.’”* (John 6:67-69) I hope that the motorcyclist knew this.

QUESTIONS

What is a common “why” question? How did Jesus, in His humanity, apparently wrestle with some of the same “why” questions that we do? What does the Father’s thrice silent “No answer” to Jesus’ Gethsemane appeals reinforce about Christianity’s unique claims to salvation?

PRAYERS FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Pray for continued financial provision for the care of Living Room’s patients. Each day we physically, emotionally, and spiritually care for adults and children in need of hospice care in Kenya.

FRIDAY

Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:5-7

This week we have dealt with some of the *who, what, where, when* and *why* questions of following Christ. Today we consider some of the *how* questions of spiritual disciplines. Most don't associate *discipline* with something positive, but rather something negative: "the practice of training ... using punishment to correct disobedience." (Oxford Living Dictionaries) Unlike many *disciplines*, however, spiritual disciplines are joyous and rewarding in drawing us closer to God and preparing us for godly service.

You don't have to be an athlete or a student to understand discipline and training. Any who struggle with weight or ever battle temptation know this. The victory's not won then and there in the initial battle, but in surrendered commitment and preparation. Paul reinforces this in today's 1 Corinthians and 2 Timothy texts. Joseph's rebuffing of Potiphar's wife's seductive advances (Genesis 39) came not in the moment, but in having committed himself fully to God and preparing accordingly. And so it is with us. If we wait only until the time of testing, we'll often fail.

Bill Gaultiere, Soul Shepherding's co-founder, categorizes the spiritual disciplines as "Disciplines of Abstinence and Self-Denial" and "Disciplines of Engagement." Abstinence disciplines include: solitude [being alone with God]; silence [becoming more available]; fasting [from food, media, etc.]; "Sabbath" [resting in God's provision]; secrecy [sufficiency in God alone, not in recognition] and submission [to God's will].

Engagement disciplines are: Bible study [including meditation and memorization]; worship [private and communal]; prayer [thanksgiving, adoration, supplication, petition, confession]; fellowship; personal reflection; and service [including giving].

I believe the more we're surrendered to spiritual disciplines, the less need God feels to discipline us—“*For the LORD disciplines the one He loves, and chastises [those] whom He receives*” (Hebrews 12:6). Israel's King David understood the key to making him “*a man after [God's] own heart*” (Acts 13:22). The Apostle Paul embraced this, grounding himself regularly in God's will. The more “self-managing” [submitted] I am, the less need for “external managing” [from God]; moreover, spiritual disciplines help me sustain close communion with Him—a glorious end in itself!

Like many, I'm inconsistent with “Sabbath-keeping”; I often struggle with submission; and my prayer life is less vibrant than I'd like. And you—where can you be more spiritually disciplined?

QUESTIONS

What are the key benefits of spiritual disciplines? What are some of the spiritual disciplines? Which of these might you benefit from if you placed greater emphasis on them.

PRAYERS FOR LIVING ROOM MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Living Room's leadership, that they will have wisdom as they make decisions and implement dreams, that God will guide them, and that God will provide for all that is required (financially, spiritually, operationally, and with human resources).

Sources

- GotQuestions?org quote is from www.gotquestions.org/Christianity-unique.
- C. S. Lewis' quote is from his book, *Mere Christianity*. Publisher Geoffrey Bles (UK), Macmillan Publishers (US) and HarperCollins Publishers (US), 1952.
- The Wikipedia quote can be found at www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criterion_of_embarrassment
- The Oxford Living Dictionaries definition can be found at www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/discipline
- Bill Gaultiere's information on spiritual disciplines can be found at www.soulshepherding.org/spiritual-disciplines-list

