**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**The Incarnation – Part VI**

***God So Loved the World – John 3:16***

 **January 7th, In the Year of Our Lord 2024**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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 In preparation to study Jesus and His life and times. . . it is profitable to learn about the 1st c. context of history, culture, theology, geography, language and more to receive the fullest understanding. Of course, all of these disciplines take years for people to study, and Sunday morning sermons can only give a glimpse into these contexts.

Obviously, no one has to do any of this preparation to know that God loves them and incarnated Himself to afford us the opportunity to be saved from sin and death. No one has to be a theologian or biblical scholar of any degree to be reconciled to God.

 With this said, it greatly assists the Believer’s witness to nonbelievers to know more about the life and times of Jesus. If you read a book about the Gospel accounts of Jesus or take a college course, you will be introduced to a view of the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) as “synoptic”. This means the first three letters of the New Testament have very similar narratives, words and chronology. Some publishers print the Gospels in parallel columns so they can be easily read for comparison. The fourth Gospel (John) is different in arrangement and greatly appeals to human love. I see we need to reflect on John’s Gospel because it is there that we will find the first answer that we need to witness to the world as to why God did what He did in the Incarnation.

**Context of Language in John’s Gospel . . . Love**

John’s Gospel was written in the last decade of the 1st century. John was in the last years of his life, and God spoke through him to share with us his life-long spiritual experience with Jesus. John was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus which included the Cross, empty tomb, Resurrection appearance/ministry and Ascension. We need to seriously consider. . . how this impacted an individual who has witnessed all these things? John lived the longest life of any of the Apostles. Remember, John was a Jew who had deep ties to the Jewish community. John lived long enough to see the prophetic words of Jesus come true when the Romans destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem, not leaving one stone unturned (70 AD) and when the last vestige of Jewish resistance to Rome was conquered at Masada (72 AD). John witnessed the most impactful event in human history, the life of Jesus, and added to the Cross. . . the destruction of his country.

So, with all of this in mind. . . what is the outcome, the fruit that was produced in John’s life? What are John’s last words? We have this witness in all of John’s letters written in the last years of his life. Historically, the Believer’s Church, starting with the Apostolic Fathers, attributed five New Testament letters to the Apostle John (John, 1,2, and 3 John, Revelation).

Therefore, after all of John’s life, we see the concentration of the word *love* is used in John more than any other book of the Bible. We read in 1 John 4:8 that God is love, and we are created in His image (Genesis 1:26,27, 9:6). I know many of you know these Scriptures, but I point out that we consider reading these words first when we witness.

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us,

 that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God,

 but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:9-11)

With these words, God speaks to us revealing His reason for creating us. . . that is to experience love. 1 Corinthians 13 testifies that love is the greatest gift and provides the best definition of love in the Bible. We need to witness to others, non-believers, that Love is a free-will-choice. To have this choice, God created us with the ability to choose love through this fallen world. Love is not love unless it is chosen. Genuine love is not compelled. God gave Adam and Eve the choice to love Him, but they chose to rebel. This rebellion created pain and suffering in the world. We see this when Cain murdered Abel. God does not create evil, fallen people do.

Jesus was there in the beginning and witnessed Adam and Eve’s rebellion. Remember, Jesus was in the beginning and created all things because He is God (John 1:1-3). Therefore, love is the catalyst of God’s Incarnation. *Love* universally appeals to the fallen human condition and provides *hope* in a fallen world void of God’s eternal *grace*. Through God extending His grace and *love* to us. . . each person who surrenders their heart to Him has access to His *peace.* God’s love is heard from the Cross as Jesus spoke. . . “When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. 34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. (Luke. 23:33-34)

Here is a list of Greek words for love used in John’s Gospel letter.

Agapao – 37, Phileo – 13, Agape -7, Philos – 6 = 63

 Along with forms of the word “love” are forms of the word “believe” (107x) and “to know” (141x) used in heavy concentration. This combination of words appeal directly to the basic human want for being accepted by God. God extends His *love* to everyone. . . saints and sinners. However, only those who surrender their personal sovereignty to Him can receive the full benefit of God’s love which starts with being reconciled to Him. . . eternal salvation. John 3:16 is comprehensive and is quoted most often. Why is it comprehensive? Translating the Greek into English conveys a general meaning but the specific Greek words highlight a deeper message.

**John 3:16**

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 you grammarian geeks. . . it is very important to understand that the Greek word *pisteuon* is translated as *believes* which is grammatically parsed as a participle verb.

Greek: **πιστεύων** verb participle present active nominative masculine singular - from root word **πιστεύω**

Why is this parsing important?

The primary mission of God’s Incarnation was to go to the Cross. One of the many additional missions accomplished was to demonstrate what real faith (faithing/believing) looked like in a fallen world. Was this possible for a person to have and live with faith in God in this fallen world? This is why Jesus emptied Himself of some attributes to become human but retained His God nature (Philippians 2:7ff).

Let us look at the kind of faith that God calls us to live.

 For those who understand parsing guides, the participle form of πιστεύω makes the word function as an adjective. This means that the verb is not a one-time action but continuing (ing). In addition, the verb participle “believe” is in the nominative case ending which points to the subject of the second half of the sentence which is the Son (Jesus).

Thus for loved the God the world so that the Son the unique to give

οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν,

 ἵνα πᾶς **ὁ πιστεύων** εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ᾽ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

in order that all the believing into him not perish but have life eternal.

God intentionally came to be one of us and, with the power and authority of His love, lived through our life challenges but set the example of how we can have peace with Him and our neighbor. God calls us to Him, not just to agree with Him but to surrender our sovereign self to Him. The demons agree that God is God, who incarnated Himself as Jesus to die on the Cross paying our debt for sin (James 2:19).

You believe (**πιστεύεις)** that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

**Greek:** **πιστεύεις** verb indicative present active 2nd person singular from **πιστεύω**

The indicative use of the verb believe is just a statement of fact that the demons only acknowledge God’s presence. Note - the Greek word **πιστεύεις** “believe” in James 2:19 is not in the nominative case.

**James. 2:20-26**

20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says,

 "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,"

and he was called the friend of God. (Genesis 15:6)

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

There are many Believers who witnessed their *participle*-belief (faith) in God and His Word. And in contrast. . . indicative-faith is witnessed in people like the Sadducees who totally denied any form of an afterlife for the soul, or resurrection. However, James, the half-brother of Jesus, had to make this participle-faith leap to become the leader of the church in Jerusalem and then was martyred for his *participle*-faith. If he would just have had an indicative-faith, he would have not become the person we read about in the Bible. God directed James to clarify the difference in his letter. James wrote that real faith/belief produces good works. Jesus taught about false prophets in Matthew 7:15ff. . . that their works produces bad fruit and are cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus also taught that Believers are known by their fruit (Matthew 12:33, Luke 6:43).

So, God’s Spirit indwelling Believers, enables them to live victorious lives

overcoming sin and death. This is one of the main teachings of the Good News and was demonstrated by Jesus during the thirty-three and one-half years of the Incarnation. With God’s love-faith working in the hearts and minds of Believers and the Believer’s Church, we are impowered to overcome all things. Paul tells the Believers in Phillippi, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13).

 Paul writes to the Believers in Corinth, Ephesus, Colossians and his student Timothy.

**2 Corinthians 12:9**

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

**Ephesians 3:16**

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

**Colossians 1:11**

strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

**1 Timothy 1:12** I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,

**2 Timothy 4:17** But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

**AMEN**