

PRAISE INTERNATIONAL

THE SIGN

JOHN 3:14-21

Good Morning

Prayer Needs

I want to talk to you about a few things that have been brewing in my heart over the past couple weeks - come out of my talks with Jesus especially as we anticipate the coming months of angst over the direction of our country.

By the first Christmas that Neice and I spent together we were engaged :) I am pretty sure it was at this first gathering that I remember watching a movie with her that has now become an annual tradition - its just not Christmas if haven't watched 'Its a Wonderful life'. Something about the simplicity of this story of a man who has come to the place in his life that he has concluded his life has had no impact and no meaning. Overwhelmed by his own sense of powerlessness he concludes the worth of his life especially as compared to what it 'should' be as not worth living - by all the apparent signs he sees his life as a failure. Then in his attempt to take his life is given the opportunity to experience to see the real sign - his life. What is fascinating is how this movie never gets 'old' - the first time I watched and was moved I watched everyone in the room with me moved. Because it speaks to something that cross's generations - none of us are immune to the messages and expectations that drive us.... the blinking signs of the world around us....

*From the time we wake up to the time our head hits the pillow at night, we are bombarded with messages and expectations about every aspect of our lives. From magazine ads and TV commercials to movies and music, we're told exactly what we should look like, how much we should weigh, how we should parent, how we should decorate our houses, and which car we should drive. It's absolutely overwhelming, and, in my opinion, no one is immune. Trying to avoid media messages is like holding your breath to avoid air pollution-it's not going to happen. It's in our biology to trust what we see with our eyes. This makes living in a carefully edited, overproduced, and Photoshopped world very dangerous. Brene Brown - *The Gifts of Imperfection.**

In our text Jesus is being questioned by Nicodemus in the night and the context? Remember last week the Jews were asking - ***what sign will you give us...*** why was that? This was not the first time a charismatic leader had come to Roman occupied Palestine - according to historians it went something like this:

- A prophetic figure arises and attracts a large following.
- The prophet leads the people somewhere, often into the wilderness.
- The prophet then promises to show an authenticating and/or liberating 'sign' to his followers.
- Before the prophet has occasion, the Roman military intervenes and violently disbands the movement.

The 'sign' would be the 'signal' to rise up, resist and take their nation back! The last success was about 200 years earlier under Judas Maccabees. These are a people who are longing to see a sign to signal a shift that would mean freedom from Rome!

Show us a sign Jesus. The sign? His life. Then as Nicodemus meets with Jesus he points to this idea

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Yes, Christ in you bringing with Him the hope of all the glorious things to come.
Col 1:27b JB Phillips***

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saying 'no one could do the 'signs' You do unless they are in union with God.' Nicodemus sees a sign and he is attempting to discern the signal - like George Bailey he is looking to make sense what he is seeing.

For every good Jew their expectation of Salvation was pretty clear - as clear as the thousands of commercials we see - the sign would mean deliverance from 'them' and we become great again.

Yet Jesus points to the **sign of new birth and the Cross** - not a sword, its new birth within, and Jesus on a cross - its the intent of the Fathers heart known to all of humanity – Vs 14-15 then comes vs 16

John 3:16-18a The Mirror paraphrase by Francois du Toit

The entire cosmos is the object of God's affection! And He is not about to abandon His creation - the gift of His Son is for mankind to realize their origin in Him who mirrors their authentic birth - begotten not of flesh but of the Father! (Jn1:13) In this persuasion the life of the ages echoes within the individual and announces that the days of regret and sense of lost-ness are over! God has no intention to condemn anyone - He sent His Son, not to be the Judge but the Savior of the world. Faith and not flesh defines you! In the persuasion of your authentic sonship there is no separation or rejection!

Vs 21 (But I have good news for you! You wont ever need to hide in darkness again!) He who discovers the poetry of truth, faces the light unashamedly - his lifestyle boldly displays the workmanship of union with God! His works speak for themselves - 'Made in heaven - wrought in God!'"

Beloved here is the simple message I have felt stirring in my heart over the past couple of weeks. We are both in a moment of 'signs' that are promising freedom and hope for our lives personally and corporately - there is no way to escape those messages. Its like trying to hold your breathe to avoid air pollution. What becomes challenging is allowing our lives to be guided by the right 'signs'. This is what repentance looks like in real time for any follower of Jesus - to have our daily George Bailey moment to believe - oh yea the Kingdom of God is here now. What Sign and I looking at.

In our text today - likely one of the most piece mealed passages of the scripture - who has not seen or heard John 3:16? **Yet how many understand the context of the bronze snake that Moses raised up among God's people who were dying of snake bites?**

- For God so loved the world....whats this about 'snake bites'?
- So little wonder that when we read John 3:14... unless the Son of man is lifted up.... and we remember Jesus dying on a Cross - we conclude...well yeah we really should have a cross on the building - right?

The story in Numbers 21 is about how the people were complaining in the wilderness about bread everyday so God allowed snakes to bite them and many died and the people confessed their ingratitude and then God told Moses to fashion a snake out of bronze - put it on a pole and the people who looked at the snake wouldn't die anymore from snake bites? God's people were saved from what was killing them by 'looking at' what was killing them: they had to look at what was killing them to not die - that required vulnerability and humility. Hey Jared what are you doing? Looking at that snake -oh you are one of them that allowed your heart to become bitter and complain - you are dying - this was the first AA meeting beloved.

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Jesus points to that story to explain how the cross works:

- "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." (John 3.14-15) Jesus compares himself on the cross to the bronze snake on a pole - not a pretty symbol on a piece of jewelry or an ornament on a building.
- The cross as an instrument of torture and execution for any who defied the Roman Empire and had killed many Israelites.
- **'The cross'** is what was killing Israel- literally from Rome and figuratively the logic of crucifixion 'we will make peace by torturing and killing our enemies' - is what leads to endless cycles of death. Side bar - that logic remains deep on the heart of humanity!

In the cross, God himself in Christ becomes what is killing the world held up on a pole for all to see. In other words: The crucifixion of God is, in fact, the very thing that is killing us. The poison that has infected our ranks is the logic that says, "here's how we protect ourselves: let's kill the man who raises the dead." The cross, then, is necessary because humans demand it; The cross then is necessary because God holds himself up on it to reveal what is killing us.

Next time you see a crucifix with Jesus on it, think of the analogy Jesus makes: "the impulse to torture and execute is what's killing you," Jesus says.

The quality of life Jesus offers us comes when we face and look at this violence in ourselves and the world, revealed in the crucifixion of God. Matt Tebbe

Beloved the Jesus to believed in Verse 16 is the Jesus who reveals us in Verse 14 - talk about a George Bailey moment! For much of my journey I have heard the Cross and the atonement primarily as a price demanded of God and the focus then on the price paid for my sin - and to be clear it was a huge price. Beloved Jesus in verse 14 of John 3 is making clear that the Cross was not a result of God's demand for punishment but of how of those who are stuck in a system of power and punishment that demands the death of another so that we can live...

If the Son of Man is lifted - **to reveal the sign - 'this' is what is killing you** - it began in the garden with your choice to find life apart from me and this is what will heal you!

God in Christ absorbing all of the violence, brokenness, and hatred of man to also **reveal something greater than what is killing us** - what can actually restore us and make us whole - self giving, self emptying love and forgiveness! **Two trees - Repent and believe!**

Our invitation in these days?

- Will we continue to surrender to the reality of the good news of this Gospel.
- What 'sign' are we looking toward? **What tree will we eat from?**
- His intent was that the manifold wisdom of God would be made known to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. The sign of that Wisdom remains what Paul proclaimed as the Wisdom of the Cross in 1 Cor 1. One of my daily prayers goes something like this -
"Oh God help us believe you that your Love will carry us on, even when we feel lost"

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Jesus message to those asking for a 'Sign' was simple and clear - it will be my life given on the Cross - it will be My life raised. Jews demand a sign - Greeks wisdom but we preach Christ and Him crucified - the Wisdom of God. **Beloved the sign that our world that my world needs that your world needs? Jesus lifted up!**

Here is my point here - how often do we find ourselves in the George Bailey space? Lord I have labored to know you, kept my prayer time, given to others in need tried to live a godly life...but man compared to the author of the latest Christian book I feel so small in fact I feel like maybe I have missed it - otherwise I should have some signs I could point to...

Wait Jesus what is the eternal Sign again?

- If I am lifted up....
- **How do we do that?** No more Jewelry or cross's in our houses or buildings...no...actually lets keep them as an invitation to look...**to repent and believe.** For me this is a daily.

Here is how I will often express this in prayer just before I begin to pray over my 'prayer list'

Lord Jesus You who with the Father, and the Spirit conceived the dream of the eternity that the invisible qualities of who you are and what you share in interdependence, the overflowing abundance of love, joy, peace, mercy and grace would become visible in what you created, that your invisible attributes would become visible in what you created - that man would bear your image in that place of beauty, communion and partnership.

That in when man chose to reject your free gift of life to eat from the knowledge of good and evil and choose to find life apart from you - rejecting that love. When death came to steal life you remained resolute knowing that it would not be power or punishment that would restore and redeem your sons and daughters but the perfect representation of what you possess - perfect love - enough to reorder the world, to redeem and restore.

*Christ Jesus above me in the vast expanse of the measureless universe
Beyond the measure of man, beyond my imagination revealing measureless grace, mercy, peace and love!*

Christ beneath me in the darkest place of all of mans brokenness

In the dark night of the soul reveal light in darkness, life for death, beauty for ashes!

Christ before me

in what I see, know and understand

Christ behind me in what I do not know, what I do not see and what I do not understand - revealing the God who is always present and at work.

Christ to my right in the strength of every good and perfect gift that comes from the Father of lights.

Christ to my left in my weakness - revealing power that is made perfect in my weakness.

Christ all around me filling all the dimensions between the particles - fulfilling the promise made to Moses and the prophets that as surely as you live and you do - the earth will be filled with the revelation of the Good Opinion of the Father towards all of His creation.

Christ formed within me - not by the certainty of my convictions or theology, not by the veracity of my morality but by faith given to me as a gift!

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Beloved may I say this over us in clarity and boldness - the greatest need of our nation and for my neighbor is not who I support for political office but that Christ is lifted up in my life!

- Their is no greater 'sign' beloved for this generation or any generation.
- That Jesus would be lifted up in our life.
- And here is anther 'sign' when we choose to accept His invitation to take up our cross.
- Not a reluctant life of religious morality but a life surrendered to self giving self emptying love.

What would it look like if I lived convinced of His convictions?

- Perhaps I would not be so swayed by concerns of the news reports or the fears of the future.
- Perhaps I could live and love more fully
- Perhaps I could live convinced that I will indeed hear His heart today
- Perhaps I could lay down my need to judge the arrogant, the weak, the broken
- Perhaps I could believe that Christ love lifted up has more impact than any of my words
- Perhaps I could begin to believe that there is more at work in handful of men and women given to the Love of Christ
- Perhaps I could surrender to the True sign Jesus visible in a life - individually and corporately – meaning that there IS something greater at work here and now and among us together! That can reshape lives and retell stories and refound the world!
- That proclaims with every step to a world around us....

The entire cosmos is the object of God's affection! And He is not about to abandon His creation - the gift of His Son is for mankind to realize their origin in Him who mirrors their authentic birth - begotten not of flesh but of the Father! (Jn1:13) In this persuasion the life of the ages echoes within the individual and announces that the days of regret and sense of lost-ness are over! God has no intention to condemn anyone - He sent His Son, not to be the Judge but the Savior of the world. Faith and not flesh defines you! In the persuasion of your authentic sonship there is no separation or rejection!

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Closing Prayer and Communion

A Collect for Fridays

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Amen.

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