

"ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN #2:  
FOUR GREAT WONDERS"

(John 3:1-4, 10-17)

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 3-5-23]

--I--

1. [11am ONLY...] Read CEB Text: John 3:1-4, 10-17 and Pray.
2. [SHOW THE FOLLOWING ON SLIDES ON SCREEN as Brian names them...
  - 1--The Great Pyramid of Giza..
  - 2--The Hanging Gardens of Babylon...
  - 3--The Statue of Zeus at Olympus...
  - 4--The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus...
  - 5--The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus...
  - 6--The Colossus of Rhodes...
  - 7--The Lighthouse of Alexandria...
3. Taken collectively, these things make up what has come to be called the "*Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.*"

A--Yet, though these are great *architectural* "wonders" from the *past*, as we continue a new sermon series, in today's encounter with Jesus in the Gospel of John we are introduced to several *spiritual* wonders that, though spoken by Jesus in the *past*, are realities designed for our benefit in the *present* and into the *future*.

B--[9am ONLY... Hear these words from John 3:1-4, 10-17,

*1 There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to see God's kingdom." 4 Nicodemus asked, "How is it possible for an adult to be born? It's impossible to enter the mother's womb for a second time and be born, isn't it?"... 10 "Jesus answered, "You are a teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? 11 I assure you that we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you don't receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Human One. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Human One be lifted up 15 so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. 16 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. 17 God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him."*

4. [BOTH services...] (Of course,) we find in this passage one of the most famous (if not *the* most famous) verse in the entire Bible: John 3:16, spoken by Jesus in an encounter with the Pharisee Nicodemus. (Say it along with me, if you know it)...

A--"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life."

B--This verse has been called "*the heart of the Bible*" and "*the gospel in miniature*" partly because it reminds us of at least "**Four Great Wonders**" for the Christian:

--II--

5. First, it reminds us that we both have and serve **A GREAT GOD**.

A--The first two words of the verse are "*For God...*" -- in other words, *God* is the reason that salvation is even possible.

1--As children, many of us were taught to pray: "*God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food. By his hands we are fed. Give us Lord our daily bread*"

2--...Reminding us that *God*, not *us*, is the source of all that is good & great in life

B--A little girl once went to a candy store with her Daddy. After the Father asked the sales clerk to let his girl have some candy out of the candy jar, the clerk asked the girl to reach in the jar and pull some out. Instead, she simply looked at the clerk.

Finally, in frustration the clerk reached in with his own hands and gave her some candy. Later, when her Daddy asked, "*Honey, why didn't you get the candy when the clerk asked you to?*" she simply replied, "*His hands were bigger.*"

1--I've heard it said that "*God wants to do more for you than you're willing to let Him do."* <sup>1</sup>

2--God, you see, is a God with big hands -- that makes Him a great God.

6. But our encounter with Jesus in John 3:16 also tells us that "*God so loved the world....*" In other words, this great *God* has for us **A GREAT LOVE**.

A--Too many people today (including too many Christians) view God as a stern, legalistic, angry old man who's just waiting to strike us down for our mistakes, with the only thing holding him back being the pleas for mercy from a loving son, Jesus.

1--But if we look more closely, we'll see in today's scripture that it is *GOD* who (all along) has had *love* for us, NOT *judgment* or condemnation.

2--Some of you have heard me say that "*God knows the worst that you will ever do, and loves you anyway.*" <sup>2</sup>

B--I don't know about you, but that sure is good news for me, because if I were judged on the worst things I've ever done, I'm not sure that *I* would love me (much less God!)

1--Yet, a father of four was asked one day, "*Why do you love your kids so much?*" The father thought for a minute, and then replied, "*Because they're mine.*"

2--Well, that's the way God feels about you and me: He loves us *not* because we *deserve* it or have done anything to *earn* it, but simply *because we are His* -- we belong to *Him*; we're *His* children, the sheep of *His* pasture.

7. And precisely *because* He is a great God who has a great love, He gave to each and every one of us on earth **A GREAT GIFT**: the gift of His Son.

A--"*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...*"

1--The Bible, you see, is the story of God's attempts to restore humanity to a right relationship with Himself -- of how, time and time again throughout history, He tried to get across His message of love to humanity: through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the prophets, the kings of Israel, etc. -- but all to no avail.

2--So finally, God wrapped himself in the skin of a human (Jesus of Nazareth) and came to earth deliver his message in person.

B--Of course, even though Jesus is a *gift*, many of us don't experience him that way.

1--Instead, we're still trying to find ways to "earn" our way back to God by being "good enough," praying hard enough, memorizing enough scripture, attending enough worship services, having perfect attendance at Sunday School, etc.

2--But though these things can help us *find & grow* in salvation, they can never *earn* us salvation. <sup>3</sup>

C--Instead, today's scripture simply says, "*God so loved the world that he GAVE his son.*"

So, have you accepted God's great gift of his son Jesus Christ? Or are you still holding out because you think that there "*has to be a catch*" to it somewhere?

8. Finally, though, this encounter with Jesus in John 3:16 also reveals that this great *gift* of great *love*, given by a great *God*, bought all of us **A GREAT SALVATION**.

A--"*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son... **so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life.***"

B--In and of our own strength and action, we human beings are "*perishing*" (as Vs. 16 puts it) because of the brokenness of our lives

C--It's a brokenness we call "sin" -- a brokenness that causes us to "fall" from the ideal that we were created to have and to live in, and that prevents us from recovering on our own -- in the words of an old TV commercial, "*We've fallen & we can't get up*"

D--Yet, the hope of the gospel is that through God's "great gift" of Jesus, there IS a way out of our human dilemma -- that sin *need not* have power over us in our lives.

1--This good news is that even though "*Humpty-Dumpty* (US) *sat on a wall*," and that even though "*Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall*" (our Sin), nevertheless "*All the King's horses* (the King here is God) *and all the King's men, women, angels and principalities...*" can, indeed, "*put Humpty back together again*."

2--The "Great Salvation" of today's text, you see, means that through the gift of his son Jesus, God does for *us* what we cannot not do for *ourselves*: ...

3--...He saves us from the brokenness of sin by sending "help" from above, so that we can be put *back in a right relationship with Him* -- that we might be made *whole* again IF we'll avail ourselves of that invitation.

--III--

9. Yes, John 3:16 is one of the most beautiful verses in the Bible.

A--But it's much more than just a pretty verse.

B--It is, in fact, "*the gospel in miniature*" because it reminds us -- just as it reminded Nicodemus in his encounter with Jesus so many years ago -- of "***Four Great Wonders***" for (and in) our lives of faith when we (like him) encounter him.

C--It reminds us that...

1--We serve a GREAT GOD,...

2--...Who has a GREAT LOVE for us....

3--And this love is shown to us through the GREAT GIFT of His Son Jesus,...

4--...so that we might have a GREAT SALVATION.

10. [*Invite congregants to make profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior...*]

11. [Suggested Closing 9am song, "Amazing Grace My Chains Are Gone" Suggested 11am closing Hymn: #378, [Amazing Grace](#)]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Shared with Brian by Rev. Claude Smithmier, now-deceased North Georgia UM Pastor.

<sup>2</sup> Heard by Brian on Christian radio station near Atlanta, May 1992. I've also heard it said that "*the love of God is like the Amazon River flowing down to water one daisy*." Well, that means that if you or I were the only ones that there were in the world, God would have still sent his son Jesus to save us.

<sup>3</sup> Oh, we may cognitively *know* that grace is *free*, but we *still* try to *do* things to keep or earn "good standing" with the Lord. Some of you may remember the 1960s T.V. show "*Candid Camera*". Well, on one particular episode, a "*Candid Camera*" agent was sent out to the streets of a busy city to pass out *free* \$100 bills. There was no catch, and no strings attached -- the producers simply wanted to see people's reactions to being offered free money. And to their amazement, very *few* people would actually *accept* the bills, thinking that there *must* be some catch or hidden motive to it, leading the show producers to conclude that *people are often unwilling to accept great gifts because they often feel that they're "too good to be true!"*