

“He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

Pastor Jacob Hanson

01/12/2020

Opening Prayer

Good Morning and welcome here to Kasson/Pleasant Corners UMC. My name is Jacob Hanson, and it is a joy to be the minister here at our wonderful churches. If you are new here, are visiting, or are here for the first time in a while, a special welcome to you. We are thankful you have chosen to worship with us, and we do pray that you would find our church to be Godly and loving. To kick off the new year we have begun a new sermon series. We are currently going through the three letters of John, starting with the first letter and ending with the third. Throughout these three letters the theme, the line that goes through them, is a focus on salvation, although there are many other points we can pull out as well.

The title for our sermon this morning is actually a quote from a well known missionary, one that some of you may have heard of before. The quote “He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose” comes from Jim Elliott. Jim Elliott was a missionary who at the age of twenty-eight gave his life as he sought to bring the gospel to the Hauroni, a formerly isolated people group in Ecuador. This man and his missionary crew were killed by the very people they were trying to evangelize to in 1956. Eventually through his actions and the actions of those with him, the Hauroni people were able to hear the gospel and many came to know Christ. Like everyone else in this world Jim Elliott and the other four missionaries who perished with him had their flaws, sins, and failings. But Elliott was not wrong when he said “He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” What would prompt a man

who is beginning the prime of his life at 28, a man with a wife and family, a man who was seminary educated and could have preached in the U.S., what would prompt him to give his life in such a way for a people he had never met? Our reading from the book of 1st John this morning helps us to understand. Perhaps we too can gain some insight into what makes our salvation so worthwhile and so valuable.

A little backstory for you on the book of 1st John and its writer. The John who writes these three letters found near the end of the New Testament is the same Apostle John who was one of the Jesus's twelve disciples. He is also the same guy who writes the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation. All of these five books have a few things in common. They all want the reader to know without any question that salvation comes through Jesus alone (that is the most important piece), they all are focused upon the importance of sticking firm in our faith to Christ, and they all warn against false teachers. But specifically the book of 1st John shares with us out of our reading today the price that has been paid for our salvation, and it shares a reminder that our lives should be beholden to Him who paid for us.

1st John 2:7 reads "Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard." Here John is speaking on something we likely already know. God has called us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to be good examples of His love in the world. If you sat down a bunch of eight year olds and asked them what God wanted them to do they could probably give you the gist of this old commandment. Something like "God wants us to be nice to each other." We get this, and so does everyone else. But John's focus isn't on that easy teaching of being nice, there is more too it than that.

1st John 2:8 states “On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.” What does John mean by that? He is giving the purpose behind our “good behavior,” that it is founded in our love for Christ. This is something that we often miss the boat on. The hard question isn’t always “what,” but sometimes it is “why.” Why does God want me to treat my horrible neighbors, coworkers, family members, and enemies with love? Because Christ first came and loved us, because He changed us, because He puts that spark within us that transforms our way of thinking to better reflect His. Living in a manner after Christ’s own heart isn’t about us begrudgingly doing the right things because we know we should but don’t really care why, it is rather about us being so filled with the love the Lord gives us that we can’t do anything BUT serve Him well! If you know the prophet Jeremiah from the Old Testament (he has a big book that he wrote) you might know that he was a very revered prophet who had to overcome many obstacles to preach the truth to the Israelites. Even though he didn’t always want to, knowing that he was going to be mistreated for speaking the Lord’s words, he states in Jeremiah 20:9 “But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him [meaning God] or speak anymore in His name,’ then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.” Like Jeremiah, the Apostle John wants his churches to see that a man or woman who walks with the Lord though they may be imperfect cannot help but follow the Lord’s calling. He wants them to understand and give in to the calling that the Lord has placed upon their hearts, the same calling that He gives us, to follow Him fully and not hold anything back. Beloved we all know we can quench the Spirit, not heed the Lord’s calling. The more we quench that Spirit and don’t listen, the further from the Lord we get. John is

aware of this, and this is why he speaks as such in this chapter. He is also very aware about what it is that does in fact usually hold us back and prompts us to go our own way. The love for this world.

1st John 2:15 reads “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Beloved Congregation, the world is a tempting and potentially comfortable cage. Think about what holds us back the most from knowing our Lord better, from serving Him better. “I couldn’t do my devotional this morning, I was too tired so I slept in.” “I haven’t prayed much lately because there isn’t much for me to pray for, MY life is going great!” “I haven’t shared my faith with my coworkers because I don’t want it to be awkward at work.” There are a million things that get in the way of us following the Lord better in this world. I am not up here trying to tell you that if you missed a Sunday service to go to a football game that you are going to hell, not at all. I am sharing with you what John shares, however, which is that putting the world first is a bad recipe for our faith. There is nothing wrong with enjoying your hobbies, vacations, family time, making money, living a nice life, or having fun. But at our core as Christians our purpose is not found in any of those things, it is only found in Christ. Furthermore, the stuff of this world (especially the evil things that try to entice us away from God) are passing away. 1st John 2:17 states “The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” All of this stuff is going to pass by. Your fourwheeler, that is going to pass by. High school, that won’t last forever. Your kids will eventually be done playing sports. You will eventually retire from work. Your money will either run out or be passed on to the next generation after you die. The muscles you put on in the gym will shrink with age. The new dresses you buy off amazon will eventually wear out. Everything in this

world will eventually age, deteriorate, rot, fatigue, and pass by. But the works that we do in the Lord, those last forever.

Our faith, beloved, is what will endure. Our salvation, and the acts that we accomplish out of it (sharing our faith with others, the prayers that we pray, the love that we show our fellow man) that endures. When Jim Elliott said “He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose” this is what he was talking about. It is ok to love the life you lead and to have fun and to enjoy the blessings that the Lord has given you, but not at the expense of your purpose here. If you have to sacrifice something in this world, your time or efforts or money or whatever, to serve the Lord as He has called you, then you should know that it is worth it. If you have to swallow your pride at work and admit to others that you are a Christian, or hold your tongue when you want to join in on that dirty joke, or if you have to cut yourself off after one beer when you are hanging out with your family knowing that a second one will be bad for you, then you should do it knowing that it is worth it. This life isn't about seeking as much pleasure as possible, it isn't about leaning into the lusts that the world has to offer, and it isn't about just passively existing until we go home to eternity. We have work to do, we have a purpose to do, and as Christians we should be opening ourselves up to the things that God has called us to. Don't hold in the Holy Spirit within you, but take up that calling! Pray when He calls you to pray. Serve in a new way when He calls you to serve. Be generous and kind not because you have to but because it is an honor to show God's love to others, because it is your purpose. Be like Jeremiah who couldn't hold in that fire. Serve like Jim Elliott knowing that even though the world will mock you for following the Lord's calling that you have a treasure in heaven awaiting you even though here the world will not understand.

The rest of 1st John 2 remarks on the end of this world as we know it. John warns his flock to be wary about any who come teaching contrary to Christ, and that we should be putting them to the test. 1st John 2:22 reads “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” Anyone who comes preaching to us saying that salvation can be found outside of Jesus is not preaching the truth. Anyone who preaches anything contrary to Christ does not speak the truth Beloved, and we should be wary in knowing that our salvation is found ONLY in Jesus. As John states in 1st John 2:25 “This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.” That is our striving goal and purpose, to seek that life for ourselves and share it with others at the Lord’s call.

The final thought I want to leave with you this morning as we close this service is that of our parable from Matthew 13:44. “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all he has and buys that field.” This parable by Jesus is on how those who find salvation give everything to the Lord, knowing that the reward (eternal salvation) is greater than anything this world has to offer. My question for you is this: does your life as a Christian reflect this salvation, or are you still captivated by the lusts of this world? If there are things you must give over to the Lord yet, I encourage you to do so. (We all hold onto something I suspect.) Why? Because we know that the joy of eternal salvation for us and others, that the joy of serving our Lord fully, is greater than anything the world has to give us. Don’t forget “He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep [the things of this world] to gain that which he cannot lose.” [Eternal Salvation.] God Bless, let us pray.

Closing Prayer