

3:16

Love That Lasts
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Love That Lasts John 3:16

If you have a Bible and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to John 3. I feel like I need to warn you from the beginning of our time together today that it's going to be a heavy time in God's Word. I think in many ways this sermon should have preceded last weeks.

Last week we came face to face with the question, do you know for certain, you're absolutely 100% sure that when you die you will go to heaven. I realize that many people and many people here, have heard that question and think there's a questionable premise behind it. That premise is that there is a heaven. And there is an alternative, i.e. hell. And there are many people who would look at heaven or hell as more imaginary or fictional.

Is it really possible that some people here will spend an eternity in a place called heaven? And is it really possible that some people who are here will spend an eternity in a place called hell? And I realize that as soon as I even say that, that it is culturally inappropriate and really just unacceptable to a lot of people to even suggest the possibility that hell is a real place and that people will go there. Many people will go there.

And I think there's a lot of reasons why that's unacceptable and inappropriate in a lot of people's eyes and maybe in many eyes here.

I think the way the church has addressed both heaven and hell in the past has been abusive in many ways. The way we've talked about heaven is sitting on clouds with a bunch of harps singing songs. That is not a Biblical picture of heaven. But then the Biblical picture of hell has really been clouded out by some pretty strong emotional fire and brimstone preaching that is less Biblical and more emotional than anything. I'm guessing that many of you have heard fire and brimstone kind of preaching?

I remember one particular preacher who said about one particular service he was going to preach that night, he guaranteed a certain percentage of people would be saved if they came to this service. So we came to the service and he, for an hour he yelled about how horrible and miserable the burn unit was at the local hospital. And he scared the living daylights out of everybody who was there and he got to the invitation and he said, "If you don't want to spend an eternity in the burn unit, then come down to the front." And so everybody was crying and come down to the front and then he got his percentage. That's how you do it. You talk about the burn unit and obviously there are abuses like that.

And then you take that and you combine it with the rampant pluralism of our day, this idea that all kinds of different people have different religious beliefs and it's arrogant, rude to say that one belief is right and another belief is wrong. And really arrogant and really rude to say that if you don't believe this certain thing that you're going to spend an eternity in damnation.

And that is prevalent even in the church. There are a lot of people in the church that would say how can we sing and worship a loving God and then talk about hell? And there's no question that you can find a plethora of preachers on TV and you can read their books and you see them and you read them who say that we should not talk about hell in the church because it doesn't make people feel good.

People don't want to talk about hell. And really when you get down to the core, you can't draw a good crowd if you talk about hell very often and you certainly can't pay all the bills if you're always talking about hell and so you don't want to talk about hell.

And as a result I am fully aware that there are many Christians and many preachers who would recommend to me that we not talk about hell, especially two days before Christmas. "People are going to hell; have a Merry Christmas." It just doesn't fit together; just a disconnect there.

But here's the deal, in the most famous verse that ever came out of Jesus' mouth, He said, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). Don't miss this. Jesus, Jesus Himself in the most famous verse about the love of God, somehow thought it significant enough to point out to us that it is God's love that rescues us from eternal perishing.

And so based on that I'm going to; step out from that which is culturally appropriate; and do what even many people in the church would recommend to not do. And I'm going to lead us in a discussion about eternal life and eternal death. And you know what, I'm just not going to apologize for that either.

I listen to a lot of preachers I respect and people I read who when they start to talk about hell get very apologetic and they say things like, "I know that hell is a difficult subject and I'd rather not talk about it. I wish we didn't have to talk about it but since it's in the Bible I guess I'm going to have to so we're going to address it." As if they're embarrassed about what God has called them to proclaim.

And it makes no sense. It makes no sense when you really think about it. I mean imagine with me, even if you're here today, you don't even believe in God, just imagine with me for a second that there really is a heaven and imagine there really is a place called hell and imagine there really is a place of everlasting joy and there really is a place of everlasting suffering. Then would it make any sense if that was true, for me to stand before you and say, "Well I'm sorry I have to warn you about eternal agony and darkness and suffering, but since I have to, I'm going to do it so let's just kind of get through this thing"?

Absolutely not, I would stand before you and urge you with everything I've got; you don't want to go there. So that's what I'm going to do. To every person here, to every child, children, please listen. I know this may not seem very important to you because you're young, but any one of us may die at 8 years old, at 18 years old or 88 years old and we don't know when that will happen and when we die we will either go to eternal life with God or to eternal death and suffering. And you don't need to be afraid of that because God has sent His Son Jesus to die on a cross for you so that you can spend eternal life with Him.

So I want to encourage you to listen very closely so that you can walk away from here and look at your mom or your dad and say, "Mommy or Daddy, I need to know how to have eternal life in heaven." Teenagers, who Satan would want nothing more in the next few minutes than to fill your mind with thoughts about presents that you're going to get over the next couple days or what your friends and you did this weekend or are doing this week.

Teenagers who are engrossed in this relationship or that relationship or looking forward to seeing this movie or playing that video game, I want to remind you that Satan will do everything he can to blind you from the things in this world that really matter by giving you those things.

And so I want to encourage you to put those out of your mind because when you go into eternity it will not matter how many iPods you have or what DVDs you have or what you've done with your friends on what weekends. The only thing that will matter in that day is what you've done with Christ for eternity so please listen.

To every married man or woman, single man or who is engrossed in the busyness of your careers, your families and your dreams, your desires and your plans and your stocks and your sports and your ballgames and your politics and your restaurants and your computers, I want to urge you to come aside from the world that is so consumed with the temporary that we are deafened to the reality of the eternal. I want to invite you to come aside from that and see the reality of the eternal for what it is.

To every older man and woman, I want to urge you not to avoid the fast approaching all important question of what will happen to your soul in a matter of years or months. I want to urge you to consider the reality of eternal life in God or eternal wrath under God. And at the end of our time together, I am going to challenge, invite, kids and teenagers and men and women for the first time to say, "I want eternal life in God."

And I know, I know that there are people that right now are thinking, "Dave, I've got this and this and this going on in my life right now and I've come to worship today and you're going to talk about hell?" If that's you, all I ask is that you just stick with me because you stick with me and we see the reality of eternal death. We will not stop there. We will see the glorious reality of eternal life and the day that is coming when you will no longer have to worry about this or this or this thing going on in your life because they will be taken care of completely so stick with me. Stick me and we'll see the beauty of eternal life.

John 3, we have spent the last few weeks looking backwards, looking in the Old Testament to help us understand this text. Now we're going to look forward. What I want us to do is I want us to look at the last words that Jesus says here in this conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:16-21, and then we're going to look at a variety of other places. We're not going to have time to turn to them all though. At different points I'm just going to call out verses here and there and I want to encourage you as you take notes to write those down so you can go back and look at them if you want. We'll look at a couple of them but not all of them. Look at John 3; we'll start here, verse 16-21.

Jesus says to Nicodemus,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (John 3:16-21).

A Contrast...

Now here's the deal in those verses. We see a variety of contrasts. We see this contrast in verse 16 between eternal perishing and eternal life. It's a contrast. We see this contrast between condemnation, those who stand condemned and salvation, those who are saved by God. And we see this contrast between darkness and light.

And so what I want us to do is I want us to see a very unpopular reality in our culture today that the Bible speaks to and then I want us to contrast that with an unprecedented rescue that is absolutely eternally life changing.

The Unpopular Reality: We are all perishing.

So let's start with the first part, the unpopular reality. And this is the unpopular reality. That Jesus is communicating to Nicodemus and to all of us today, this is the reality, we are all perishing. We are all perishing.

Now this is an unpopular reality because no one likes to think about how we're dying in sin. Does it make for good table conversation to talk about how we're dying and perishing but Jesus doesn't shy away from this. In fact He uses this word here, He uses it again in John 10:28 and then uses it again in John 17:12.

In fact, when you kind of take a step back and look at all that Jesus says in the Gospels, Mathew, Mark, Luke and John and this picture of His life that we have, about 15% of His teachings, about 15% deal either with judgment or hell. You look at all the Gospels, you will see over 30 different instances, separate instances—this doesn't even include the overlapping that Mathew and Mark maybe talk about the same instance. You've got over 30 separate instances where Jesus is talking specifically about eternal judgment in hell.

And even in this verse it's so soaked in God's love, it's what we think of when we think of the love of God, just two verses later He's talking about condemnation. He says now God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but save the world through him.

But listen to verse 18, "*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*" (John 3:18). Here's what Jesus is saying there. He didn't come into the world to condemn the world. What He's saying is the reality is that the world is already condemned. Condemnation is not just this future thing that's going to happen to any one of us some day out there. Instead, what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is right now, without apart from belief in Him, you stand condemned, already condemned. We are perishing.

The reality is Jesus has sounded the alarm to Nicodemus. A good religious man that he's talking to who has done all the good things in life, has a great family, goes to a great church so to speak, he's done it all. And Jesus is saying to him, apart from belief in Him he stands condemned before God. And He's saying you don't want to die in that state.

And here's a few of the things He says about our condemnation. Number one, our condemnation is personal. It's personal. The core issue in the New Testament, really in all of Scripture, but when Jesus is talking about judgment and condemnation, the core issue is that every single person, every person stands before God condemned for their sin.

Don't miss this. This is not a sermon that is singling out any one particular person. On the contrary this is a text that is singling out every single person in this room. All of us stand

condemned before God for rebelling against him, for choosing our way instead of God's way, for rejecting Him, for choosing to live life apart from Him.

All of us, personally, not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, the person you think of when you think of sin—your life, personal condemnation that if you were to stand before God to give an account for your life, sin would be written all over it. All of us have rebelled against God from the least to the greatest, from the poorest to the richest, from the nicest to the meanest person. We all, all stand condemned before God.

Not only is our condemnation personal, second, our condemnation is total. Now here's where we ask the question, this idea of perishing, isn't that a little extreme as a punishment for sin to perish for eternity? Any discussion of hell we always ask the question, "Isn't that a little extreme to perish for all of eternity because of my sin? Is God overreacting there? Isn't that a little overkill?" What we've got to realize here is why perishing is equated with the sinning against God.

And the reason is because God in and of His nature is infinitely good. He is infinitely great. He is infinitely holy. He is infinitely wonderful and He is infinitely worthy. And therefore any insult to His worth, any insult to His holiness, any rebelling against Him and rejecting against Him is an infinite insult, an infinite rebellion, an infinite rejection and deserving of infinite punishment. And this is why Scripture makes very clear; and there have been people all throughout church history that have tried to refute the picture that's here in Scripture but it is all over it.

Scripture makes very clear that when you die apart from Christ, condemnation is a reality and that doesn't mean you just go out of existence. It means that you remain for all of eternity under the wrath of God. Now as soon as I say that many people think well what do you mean? Look at the very end of this chapter, John 3, look at verse 36. This chapter that gives us this great picture of God's love; this is one of the most sobering verses in all of the Book of John, really all the Bible. Listen to this.

John 3:36, "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*" God's wrath remains on him, it's the same picture... Go over to the last book in the Bible; go to Revelation 14. Revelation is a book that's written by the same guy who wrote the Gospel of John. John's writing this. He's given us a picture of end times and there's a lot of discussion, a lot of debate about Revelation and what this imagery or what that picture means.

We don't even have to get into what it means, just look at the picture that's being depicted here and you'll know... You'll know this picture of how God judges sin. Look at Revelation 14:10. This is context here is talking about he who worships gods apart from the one true God, who turns from the one true God. Listen to what it says, verse 10. Revelation 14:10, listen to these words, "*...he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb*" (Rev. 14:10). Did you catch those words? "He will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath." Can you imagine any stronger depiction of the fact that perishing is not just going out of existence. Perishing is experiencing the wrath of God. His condemnation is total.

And not just total and personal, third, our condemnation is eternal; it's eternal. Now when you go back to John 3:16 it doesn't say eternal perishing there, but it does contrast with eternal life. And you look at other places where Jesus talks about hell in Scripture. Mathew 25:46 talks about how many will be given over to eternal punishment.

Even here in Revelation 14, look at verse 11. Look at this, "And the smoke of their torment rises;" underline these words; they're heavy words, "Forever and ever." "*The smoke of their torment rises forever and ever*" (Rev. 14:11). Same phrase is used over in Revelation 20:10 to talk about how the wrath of God is on them forever and ever, eternally, always, never ending. That when you stand condemned before God, there is never a point where that condemnation and being under the wrath of God will cease. It's eternal.

And as a result our condemnation is not just personal and total and eternal. It is irreversible. It's irreversible. There is no evidence in Scripture whatsoever, that once we die under the condemnation and judgment of God for our sin apart from Christ, there is no evidence whatsoever that there is any hope of changing that in the future. It is irreversible. That is a sobering thought that once we die condemned, we are condemned forever and there is nothing that could change that.

Now when we come to Scripture and we see these kinds of descriptions of judgment and hell, even from the mouth of Jesus, I don't think the primary purpose of Jesus saying these things is to give us an exact representation of what hell looks like.

I don't think He's trying to spell out point by point this is what you can expect in hell. This is what it will look like. This is what it'll feel like. Now there's obviously a lot of imagery and that's where you get into a lot of debates about hell. It's a figurative or literal this or that. I don't think the primary purpose though is to give us an exact representation of what hell looks like. I think the primary purpose of Jesus and other New Testament authors here, when they talk about judgment and hell is to make it very clear, you don't want to go there. You don't want to go there.

And the New Testament clearly depicts hell as a state of conscious pain that's at least comparable to burning in which we will realize a few different things. Number one, in hell we will realize how serious our sin really is. We will realize how serious our sin really is. We have no clue about the seriousness of our sin. But I'm convinced in hell and what Scripture teaches us, for the first time we will be exposed to the guilt that we bear for turning from our Maker to ourselves and we will recoil in horror at the depth of which we have rebelled against our Creator.

We will realize how serious our sin really is and we will look back at all of those times that we have experienced, when we thought about repenting and turning to God but this little voice inside of us said, "It's not that bad. It's not that bad. Don't worry about it. You can do that later." We will look back at all those times and long that we would have in one of those times realized the seriousness of sin that we realize at that moment. We'll realize how serious our sin really is.

Second, we will realize how just God really is. For the first time we will realize how right it is that we would be excluded from His presence and His love and His joy for all of eternity. We will not have questions there about whether or not this is right of God or just of God to be in hell for all of eternity. The question won't remain because we will realize the depth of our sin and the justice of God.

And to that point we come back to that question, is this fair of God? Isn't this overreacting? Isn't this overkill? Is it fair for this punishment to be put on sin? Don't miss this, please don't miss this. We do realize that for any one of us who rejects God in this life, rejects Christ in this life and finds their self spending eternity in hell, we will only be experiencing exactly what we wanted our entire life, separation from the love of God and the presence of

God and the guidance of God and the care of God that we have spurned over and over and over again throughout our entire life.

God will finally give us over to that which we have embraced all of our lives and we will experience the reality of that which we have ourselves chosen. We won't have to deal with God. We're not separate, apart from His love and experiencing separation from Him for all of eternity. We will realize how just God really is to give us exactly what we desired. What a horrible thought that He would give us exactly what we desired.

We will realize how serious sin really is, how just God really is and we will realize how endless suffering really is. We, different ones of us, have experienced varying levels of pain or suffering in this life and there are people here that have experienced far more physical suffering than we can even imagine. But any of us know there are points whether in our lives or in others' lives that we see where physical suffering is so painful that you even look forward to death because that's the hope of that suffering ending. And it's a very difficult place to be.

I was talking with one person on the phone this last week about his wife who is going through all kinds of pain and he said to me, "She and sometimes I just wish that it could all end just to get her out of the pain that she's going through;" even looking to death as a hope of ending suffering.

But here's the deal, what if there's a point where we can no longer even say that? What if there's no hope of it ever ending? What if that suffering continues day after day, year after year after year after year after millions of years, at the end of which you realize that you're no closer to the end than when you first started and you will never, ever be delivered from that? There is no hope of any change, forever.

The Unprecedented Rescue: God is all-pursuing.

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him," would never have to experience that, would never perish. The unpopular reality and I realize how unpopular it is, but it is what Jesus sounds very clearly to us. We are all perishing and it sets the stage for the unprecedented rescue. We are all perishing but God is all pursuing. God does not leave us in a state where we stand condemned before Him.

If that were the case then all of us, myself, any one of us, the best person here would stand under the wrath of God. But that is not where God leaves this picture. He pursues this picture and where our condemnation is personal, His salvation is personal.

In John 6:44 Jesus says, "the Father is personally drawing people to me." That the Father is opening our eyes to see who He is, to see who Christ is. This whole picture in John chapter 3 of darkness and light, we all resist the light. We want to be in darkness. Why, because nothing is exposed in the darkness. When you come into the light everything is exposed, all of our sin, all of the depth of our sinfulness exposed and nobody wants that. We do everything we can to avoid that.

I'm convinced that's one of the primary reasons why hell is treated so tritely in our culture today. It is a slang term. "That was a hell of a game," or it is a joke that we say, "I'm probably going to go to hell for that one," and we laugh it off. And I'm convinced we try to lighten it up to cover up for the fact that the last thing we want to address in our lives is the depth of our sinfulness and the darkness that is there.

But the beauty is, God opens our eyes to His light and He draws us into the light and yes, He exposes all of this. But it far outweighed by the glory that we see in Christ who covers all of the darkness with His light. And He introduces us to Himself and whereas before faith God was a fog. Now in faith God is light and we see Him for who He is and we know Him. We relate to Him and we experience Him. His salvation is extremely personal. Not just for the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, He saves you. He draws you to Himself.

And where our condemnation is total, His salvation is total. He doesn't leave one remnant that is under His wrath. He takes it all. He forgives it all. He pours out grace on it all. He covers it all. "*As far as the east is from the west,*" Psalm 103:8-12, He separates our sins. They are gone. They are washed, cleansed. His salvation is total.

"Eternal life," this whole word He used at the very beginning of the Book of John, "*in [Christ] was life, and that life was the light of men*" (John 1:4), and then 36 times after that he uses this word "life".

It's over and over again. John 10:10, Jesus says, "I came so that you might have life, and have it to the full." He's not just talking about life in the future. He's talking about life now, abundant life now. John 5:24, "*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me,*" listen to this, "*has eternal life.*" Not will have eternal life one day, has eternal life right now. He has now passed from death into life.

His life is total, life in Christ, the life of Christ that is shared with you. His salvation is personal and total and it is eternal. It is eternal. Just as condemnation has no end, salvation has no end. The life that Christ gives cannot be interrupted by death itself. This is good news.

Over the last year as your pastor I've been a part of a variety of funerals, some of them tragic funerals, unexpected funerals. And I've come back over and over again to Jesus' words in John 11:25-26 when He said, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*" No matter how horrible Josh Kennedy's cancer was, he had come to faith in Christ and he is not dead. He is alive. And no matter how much we miss the likes of Margie Shepard or Roland Aaron, James Jones, brothers and sisters they are not dead. They live in Christ. His salvation is eternal and the life He gave to them here is the life they experience in greater abundance now.

And His salvation is irreversible. This is the beauty. He uses this word eternal 17 different times in the Book of John. Three times more than any other book in the New Testament and he's making a point here. The life that Christ gives cannot be taken away. When you come to faith in Christ and the Father wraps you in His hands, the Bible says that you are in Christ and He puts His Spirit inside of you, the Spirit of Christ living in you, you realize what that means?

That from the moment you come to faith in Christ, from that moment out throughout all the rest of eternity, for the devil to get to you he would have to break through the hands of the omnipotent God the Father and once he did that, he would have to come face to face with the Savior who flat out took him down at the cross. And if he was able to get past Him he would still have to deal with the Spirit of the living God and has sealed your soul with the blood of Jesus Christ. It is not going to happen. His salvation is irreversible and there is nothing that can take away the life you have in Christ; nothing. He who began this good work in you will carry it to completion forever (Phil. 1:6). His salvation is irreversible.

Now here's the deal. In Scripture, again like we talked about with hell, I don't think the primary purpose; it's not that it's not there, but the primary purpose of talk about heaven, is not to give us the exact explanation of what heaven's going to look like. There are a lot of things in there that help us, yes, but I think the primary purpose of the picture of heaven is to say to us, "You want to go there."

And in heaven, whereas in hell we will realize how serious sin really is. In heaven we will realize how glorious grace really is. You know I even have to take a couple steps back from that statement because I think in heaven we will realize how serious sin really is but we'll just realize it from a completely different perspective. We will realize the depth of our sin but we will know it by the magnitude of the grace that stooped down to where we are to pull us to where we are now. We will realize how glorious grace really is and for the first time we will realize how deep our sin was and how great grace really is. We have no clue. I have no clue the depths of grace that have been shown to me and to you. We will realize how glorious grace really is.

And we will realize, second, how merciful God really is. Remember hell, we'll realize how just God really is? We ask the question is this just of God? This picture of eternal perishing, is that fair?

Brothers and sisters don't miss this. In order to get to hell you have to run blindfolded with your ears deafened so that you cannot see and hear about the epic sacrifice of all of human history when God took His one and only Son, lifted Him up on a cross and there poured out His wrath of sin on Him and He poured out His judgment on sin on Him and God in the flesh, the very Son of God went to hell on a cross and cried out in the darkness, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" And He experienced the wrath of sin upon Himself so that you would not have to experience it. And He says to all people in all history, "If you will believe in my wrath being poured out on my Son instead of you, if you will believe in my love, then you will have eternal life." God help us not to question Your fairness whether or not You're doing what's right and good for us, we will realize how merciful God really is.

And whereas in hell we will realize how endless suffering really is, in heaven we will realize how endless satisfaction really is, how endless satisfactions really is. Let me show you a picture of this.

If you're still in Revelation go with me over to Revelation 21. While you're turning there you know there's this tendency, even among Christians who've followed Christ for a long time... There's this tendency when you think about heaven, and part of it's because of this image of harps and clouds and that sort of thing... We don't verbalize this, but sometimes we think, "If heaven is eternal, won't it be eternally boring?"

I'm just going to get that out there. There are many of us who think, "You know I mean I like singing, but I mean singing forever? And I like the picture of playing harps in complete peace, but that's a lot of harp playing to never end. Isn't there hope of that ending?" And we start to think, "You know, we all like change, forever, something forever?"

Revelations 21,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with

them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son' (Rev. 21:1-7).

Brothers and sisters, I promise you, you and I will never tire of being sons and daughters of the Most High God, being with Him for all of eternity.

And here's where we come back, don't miss it. I know, that there are hurts and there are issues and situations and circumstances that people are going through that are very painful, very confusing. There's a lot of anxiety and struggling and wrestling with that and I want to remind you that no matter how deep that hurt is and no matter how confusing it is, no matter how painful it is, there is coming a day when the God of the universe will personally wipe every tear from your eyes and you won't hurt anymore and there won't be the pain of separation anymore and there won't be the pain of divorce anymore.

There won't be the pain of divorce anymore. There won't be the pain of cancer anymore. And there won't be the plight of AIDS anymore. Old will have gone and the new will come and we will enjoy the new for all of eternity. We will realize how endless satisfaction really is.

Here is the truth of God's Word. Every single life here, every child, every teenager, every man, every woman is headed toward either everlasting joy or everlasting suffering. Every life here based on the authority of God's Word is headed either to heaven or to eternity in hell and both of them will last forever.

A Choice...

Trust in Your Savior or Trust in Your Self

And God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever in this room believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life in heaven. And that leaves every single person here with one choice and the choice is this. You can either trust in your Savior, the Son of God on a cross or you can trust in yourself and that choice is the determining factor in the weight of eternity for your life.

Will you bow your heads with me? Your heads bowed and your eyes closed, I want you to just think with me about the awesomeness of this moment right here. We have heard the truth of God's Word. You have heard the truth of God's Word and here's the deal. I know there might be some people who don't think it's true and if that's you, if you don't think it's true, my encouragement to you is to find out why it's not. Better make sure it's not true and search until you find out it's not true. I've been down that road. That's why I stand before you.

We've heard Jesus say that when each of our lives is over on this earth, He came so that your life, which right now is perishing, will not go into eternal perishing but will go into eternal life. And based on what we've seen in God's word, He is drawing men and women

personally to Himself, kids, teenagers, all to Himself right now. Businessmen and businesswomen, moms and dads, kids, students, today God is drawing you from darkness into light in this moment and the beauty of it is that in this moment, because of grace, because it is based absolutely on nothing you do but the drawing of God to Himself, for you to respond to that drawing to trust in the Savior, you can know that you have eternal life in God.

This is not some fictional story. It is not a religious exercise to do. It is a point where you as a child or teenager or a man or a woman are given the opportunity to decide whether or not to confess faith in Jesus. And in the quietness now I want to invite kids and teenagers and men and women for the first time to do that, to confess faith in Jesus and to receive His gift of eternal life.

What I'm going to ask you to do is not to come down to the front this morning, I'm going to ask you in just a moment if you for the first time are ready to confess faith in Jesus. Then I'm going to ask you very simply, in just a moment as we have our heads bowed, I'm going to ask you to raise your hand where you are as a physical picture of you saying between you and God, this is a personal decision between you and God today I confess that I am perishing and I need You and Your love to cover over my sins and to give me eternal life. And I raise my hand knowing that there's nothing I can do to earn that or deserve that but I raise it in trust that when I place my faith in you, when I confess my faith in You that I will be forgiven of all my sins and I will know the confidence of eternal life in heaven.

And in just a moment I'm going to ask kids, teenagers, men, women here to do exactly that. I'm going to ask you to keep it raised and together I'm just going to lead you in a confession of faith. You're not going to have to say anything out loud. I'm not going to put you on the spot. This is between you and God where you are to have the opportunity to say between you and Him; I'm trusting in you today. I'm no longer trusting in myself, putting my pride down.

So if that is the desire of your heart, then I want to invite you right now to lift your hand if you would say I'm ready to confess my faith in Jesus for the first time. Thank you; hands going up. Thank you for your honesty for the first time I'm ready to confess my faith in Jesus. I'm ready to receive eternal life. Keep your hands raised. I want to lead you in a confession of faith. Men and women, we're not playing religious games, not going through the motions, a personal surrender of your life.

With your hands raised I want to invite you just in your heart to say to God right now with your hand raised, "God, I know I'm perishing in my sin and today I receive your love. I ask you to forgive me of my sins, all of them brought into the light, and I know that you have brought them into the light so that you can cover them with your light and so I receive your forgiveness today." And I want to invite you to say to God right now, "I receive your gift, in my heart, I receive your gift of eternal life today." As you put your hands down I want you to know that every man, woman, boy and girl who puts that kind of faith in this God, who trusts in Him; the Bible says, "*If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Rom. 10:9).

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