Grand Opening sermon – 9/15/24

The Word of God and God The Word

The Word of God

Pastor Brian

This morning I want to talk about a book that saved my life, because it pointed me to the Savior who saved my life. The Word of God – the Bible, which pointed me to God the Word – Jesus. Kerry is going to share about the God the Word – Jesus in just a moment.

I want to tell you a little bit about my story: In my early twenties, I began to have an intense desire to know truth. I had massive questions. Who am I? Why am I here? What is life all about? Is there a purpose to life? Is there a god? Can we even know the answers to these questions. These kinds of questions came about after witnessing and experiencing a lot of pain and emptiness in life at an early age. Almost all of this was brought about by my own doing…but that's another story for another time. I began an intense effort to "fix myself"…I was broken…and this search for meaning started with reading a few books I had come across on philosophy.

It was at that time that I realized two undeniable truths: First, my soul (whatever that was) was longing for something that transcends this world, something GREATER than this world. Second, I don't want that "something", whatever it is, to be a lie. It must be REAL.

I began to read book after book. I read everything I could get my hands on. I read western philosophy. I read Greek philosophy. I took classes on philosophy, astronomy, literature, psychology. I was searching within, above, without. The more I read, the more dissatisfied I became with the answers…and the more my search developed into an insatiable ache within me.

I turned to eastern philosophy, I turned to the new age scene, I began to meditate. I took classes on healing and meditation. I went to school in downtown

Seattle to get my degree as a massage therapist. My search eventually took me across the world to Asia. I lived with a meditation instructor and I would explain to him this ache within…something wasn't clicking. The more I studied, meditated, the more I searched, the more empty I became…the more contradictions I began to perceive in the answers I was given. He suggested we go on a pilgrimage to Asia which I was very excited about. I thought maybe I would finally reach some level of enlightenment or get some answers there that I had not yet come to. We went to Korea and Japan. We hiked up to temples where people were there who had been on the "quest" for truth for decades…but still they hadn't found what they set out to find. During the trip I had a watershed moment. It wasn't on top of a mountain in a temple. It was in the back of a cab driving through Taejon…I asked myself – "Brian, are you happy? Have you found what you set out to find years ago?" Can I ask you that question? Do you have answers to the questions that mean the most in life? Is your life purposeful, or are you just living. And in all honesty I wasn't happy. In fact, I was more confused than ever before. My meditation instructor was in the front speaking with the driver and I simply said, "I want to go home now…I'm done."

I went back to the states. I visited my family in Seattle, I was living in California now and decided to see family over the holidays. One night, it was Christmas Eve, I sat in the middle of my parents living room and began to sob uncontrollably. I was lost. I didn't know who I was, I didn't believe in anything, I didn't believe anyone had any answers for me, and I couldn't think of one good reason to go on living.

When I got back to California, there was a group of Christians who were at the gym that I was going to. They would come up to me and talk about Jesus. I thought, "What do these guys think they really know about truth…I've been across the world in search of truth." I was very arrogant in what I thought I knew. But they slipped me a Bible. In all of my searching, I had never read the Bible! I had gone to a very liberal church growing up…so to me that was what Christianity looked like. It was very western, very simplistic, with fanciful claims of miracles, and someone rising from the dead, that hadn't happened. To me, Christianity was just another system of faith among thousands in the world. "An opiate to the masses", as Karl Marx once said, intended to numb the pain of this world. I didn't want to be numbed…I wanted what was real, I STILL WANT WHAT IS REAL. I

DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE IN SOMETHING JUST TO NUMB THE PAIN. If you've ever seen the movie the Matrix….Neo swallows the pill because he doesn't want "IGNORANCE"…IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS. I didn't want to be numbed, I wanted the hard truth…even if reality was, "nothing is real".

When I began to read the Bible. I immediately realized something. I didn't believe what I read, not initially, but I did realize that Christianity was not what I thought it was, what I had learned it was. All of the teachers, philosophers, new age gurus had thoughts about Jesus, and I had learned about Jesus from them! But as I read the Bible for myself I realized they didn't have a clue who Jesus was! Here is a fact for you: Every other religion and philosophy out there is all about what YOU DO to appease God, to climb the ladder, to fix yourself, to reach a state of knowledge or enlightenment, to become a good person. Christianity teaches that we are born dead to God, but that God sent His Son on a rescue mission to save humanity. We don't climb a ladder to God, God comes down to us to save us! That's Christianity, whether you want to believe in it or not. You can't say it's something other than what it claims to be! I began to pray things like, "God I don't believe, and I don't want to be duped by another system of religion. If you are real, if what I'm reading is real, I want to know you, and you are going to have to break through some very hard rock in my own skeptical heart."

One day while going for a walk in Rancho Santa Margarita, my heart still very much aching, but God beginning to work within me, I heard music playing from what looked like a warehouse. I cautiously walked in and realized that it was a church. People were praising God with their hands lifted up. I slid quietly into the back of the room, and I began to listen to the preacher who began to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. That God sent His Son to save me from my sin. That I needed to receive Him as my personal savior. Very simplistic truths, nothing deep philosophically, but shared in a very powerful way. The man asked, "does anyone here want to personally know God through Jesus Christ?" Yes! I want to know Him…are you going to show Him to me? Is He going to come down somehow…yes, I want to know Him! So rather unemotionally, I raised my hand. At that point something happened. Everyone has a different experience when they trust in Christ…for me it was quite clear, I think God knew I needed it to be. I could feel something different happen within me…and no one, for one second can tell me that it wasn't real. I was born again. I left that church and walked back up

the road and I can remember it like it was yesterday, this was 20 years ago, and I said to myself, "I found it! I found the truth! I'm all yours God and there is nothing I want to do with the rest of my life but to know you and make you known to others." I went into that church with an ache and with a hole within me…I left FILLED! That's the best way that I can explain it to any of you.

The Word of God did that in my life! I can't think of another subject I want to talk about for the rest of my life, because it is the Word of God, the Bible, that pointed me to God the Word, Jesus, and to a very real relationship with God who loved me so much that He sent His Son to die for me and to rise again from the dead.

Now, we're starting a church. I want to quickly give you several reasons why the Bible will be the main topic of discussion every time you come into this church.

2 Timothy 3:16 says this, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"

First, the Bible is inspired by God even though it's written by man. "all Scripture is breathed out by God". This is a single word in Greek which means – "God-breathed"! This is a miracle, but if there is a God why would we not allow for miracles to happen?! When you read the words of the Bible you are reading the words of man, but God Himself has providentially spoken through those men and the message of the Bible is just as relevant today as it always has been. That God can use a man – his words, his cultural context, his language, and then speak through that is a miracle – but I believe that God can break into the natural order of reality and DO THINGS! He can use a virgin womb to bring about the Son of God. He can split the Red Sea in two so that people would walk through on dry ground. He can resurrect a man from the grave. And He can speak through human authors in such a way that the Scriptures are the product of human authors inspired by God. Now there is so much testimony to the power and voracity of God's Word. There is more manuscript evidence to support and substantiate that what we have today is a faithful reproduction of what was originally written than any other ancient document. There is so much archaeological evidence that supports the historical events that we read about in the Bible. There is so much prophecy that was given in the Old Testament that

has come to pass exactly as it was foretold – especially regarding the major topic of the Bible which is Jesus…the Son of God. We could talk about all of that…but to me, the reason I believe the Bible is the Word of God is because the Bible has changed my life! Now you may not care about that evidence, but I want to ask you, have you read it? The Bible claims to be not just any book…but the very Word of God! What can be more important than that?! Before you scoff at this, have you read it? What do you have to lose?

Second, the Bible is "profitable for teaching" – another word is "doctrine". Teaching about God. Teaching about life. Teaching about who I am and why I'm here. Teaching that points us to the most glorious person in the universe – Jesus Christ! There is so much uncertainty and confusion in this world! The Bible provides truth that guides us through the darkness as it illumines everything in this world and helps us to make sense of it all. Like a tree that is planted by streams of water…the roots are made strong, and the tree is able to withstand the strongest of storms in life…so is the man or woman who meditates on the Word of God day and night (Psalm 1:3).

Third, the Bible is "profitable…for reproof". That means showing me where I am wrong. Oh how I so often need to see where I'm wrong! There are so many opinions out there regarding right and wrong…we don't even know what's up from down anymore. Truth is being rewritten and everyone is more confused than ever. It takes great humility to be sure, and thank God there is forgiveness in Jesus for every wrong. But I need help to see where I am wrong. Only the Bible can accurately reveal where I've gone off. Where I am wrong in life. It reproves me!

Fourth, the Bible is "profitable…for correction". Not only does the Bible show us where we are wrong, it shows us how to right the wrong. It provides the correct pathway. It teaches us repentance. It corrects us.

Last, it's "profitable…for training in righteousness". The Bible teaches us how to live a godly and righteous life. The Bible will be the main topic of discussion in this church because it teaches us about the righteousness that is only in Jesus. It points us to the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus and what it means to live a life surrendered to Him.

Now you're here, and we're starting off on a journey together in this church. I have no idea what God is about to do…and that excites me. We are caught up into something greater than us! Will you consider taking this journey with us? The Scriptures are going to keep us on course. They will be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Jesus is going to build His church. Now Kerry is going to tell us more about Jesus…the central topic of the Bible.

God the Word
Pastor Kerry

Introduction: Thank you, Pastor Brian. This morning, I want to read two verses from **chapter three of the gospel of John**. The first is probably the best-known passage of Scripture found in the Bible. It's **John 3:16**. **I'm sure many of you have this one memorized**. According to **World Vision** which tracks internet searches for passages found in the Bible, in **2022** this was the **most searched-for-verse of all 31,102 contained in the Protestant Old and New Testaments**. **But the second one might be the most important verse in the Bible. And here's why. Because no one goes to heaven without it**. I'm talking about **John 3:17**. Let me read both to you. **John 3:16-17 -- For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**

Now both of these verses are vital when it comes to the topic of salvation because they provide the reason why anyone can go to heaven. Outside of the truth contained in them, we have no hope whatsoever. ***We are doomed to an eternity separated from God in Hell***. With that in mind, let's consider what each verse says about **the purpose of Christ's coming**. Together they contain GOOD NEWS, BETTER NEWS AND THE BEST NEWS OF ALL.

First the Good News! God loves you. In fact, God loves everyone. A good definition of love **is self-sacrifice that achieves the highest good of another.** In these verses, God's love is seen in what Christ did and did not do.

- **What He did: In obedience to His Father's will, Jesus came into the world as a fully human person. And then as a human representative, He offered Himself as the payment for man's sin.** What do we know about His incarnation when God the Son became a human being? Well, we know that Jesus came into the world the same way all of us did. He was born of a woman (*His mother was Mary*). Now, of course, He didn't have an earthly father. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High (*a very common name for God among the Jews*) overshadowed her so that she was able to give birth to **the Son of God** (**Luke 1:35**). **And because He was God's Son, Jesus was able to do everything in keeping with His Father's will**. In short, unlike the rest of us, He never sinned. Everything He did was pleasing to His Father (**Which of you convicts me of sin? – John 8:46**) Then, at the right time, at the perfect moment in all of human history, Christ, the sinless Son of God died on the cross as our substitute, taking upon Himself the just punishment intended for each of us. The last part of **3:16** tells us that <u>when we believe in Jesus</u> (**when we put our faith and trust in Him**) we know that we will not perish, but have eternal life. **1 John 5:13** says this, "**He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life**." That's the gospel message, the good news! That Jesus came into the world to sacrifice Himself for us.
- **What He did not do: John 3:17** continues to herald the good news. **<u>Only instead of focusing on what Christ did for us in obedience to His Father, we're told what Christ did not do</u>. He did not condemn the world**. **If that doesn't bring a smile to your face, then you need to take a closer look at yourself in the mirror**. The Bible tells us in **Romans 3:23** that **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**. Listen to how the same thing is said in other places in Scripture. (**1**) **All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way – Isaiah 53:6**; (**2**) **For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it – James 2:10**; (**3**) **(We) call evil good and good evil, (we) put darkness for light and light for darkness** (**Isaiah 5:20**); (**4**) **(We) plan iniquity and plot out evil on (our) beds – Micah 2:1**. If you don't think these verses apply to all of us, guess again. When **John 3:17** says Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world, it doesn't mean that the world didn't deserve it. **The great myth that men want to believe is that human beings are basically good**. But the Bible says otherwise. **Jeremiah 17:9** tells us that **the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it**? Contrary to what we want to

believe – that we are always victims, never villains, always deprived, never depraved – the Bible is not very flattering when it comes to describing the darkness of our souls. **Chuck Colson told the story of Holocaust survivor, Yehiel Dinur**. He gave testimony during **the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the architect of the Nazi "final solution" during WW I**I. This evil man presided over the slaughter of millions of Jews. As Dinur testified in court as to the crimes of Eichmann, he suddenly broke into uncontrollable sobs and collapsed on the floor. When asked later to explain his actions, he said, "**I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this…exactly like he**." The reporter who interviewed Dinur concluded that the most chilling fact about Adolf Eichmann was that he was normal: "**Eichmann**," he said, "**is in all of us**." The Bible agrees. Sin in all its ugliness has affected every human heart. There is no difference between any of us when it comes to sin. We all stand condemned before God. That's what we read in **John 3:18 -- Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already**. This is why **John 3:17** is so crucial to our thinking. Jesus could have been sent to condemn us because we certainly deserved it. But that wasn't why God sent Him. **So, there is good news and great hope in these verses**. Still, we need to start where the Bible does. **We can't be forgiven until we admit we're sinners who are under the condemnation of God**.

Then, the Better News! The second half of **John 3:17** tells us that our Lord's purpose in coming was "**that the world might be saved through Him**.' **Luke 19:10** tells us "**the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost**." **What is Jesus like?** He's like a woman who lost a coin and searched her house until she found it. He's like a shepherd who lost one sheep and didn't rest until he brought it safely back to the fold. He's like a father who welcomed home his prodigal son. Jesus came seeking those caught in the act of adultery, blind beggars, lepers and a wild demon-possessed man living in the tombs. He even came seeking self-righteous Pharisees who didn't think they needed a Savior. He came seeking fishermen, physicians, tax collectors and even one who was hanging on a cross beside Him at the very end of His suffering. **What does this say to us?** Even the worst of us can be saved. As **Corrie Ten Boom** liked to say, "**There is no pit so deep that the love of God is not deeper still**." GOD HAS MORE GRACE IN HIS HEART TO GIVE US THAN WE HAVE SIN IN OUR LIVES. Or as someone else has said, "**Jesus is a better Savior than you are a sinner**." For some, that's hard to believe. We shudder to think that someday God will play back the unedited transcript of our lives! But it is

the glory of God and His gospel that no matter how bad your sins may be, Christ came to save you. This brings us to the Best Possible News.

The Best News! You can be saved right now through faith in Jesus Christ. But this kind of faith isn't limited to just recognizing the general truth of these verses. **It's got to be personal.** Let's try to break this down a little bit by looking at **two aspects** of **John 3:17**.

- Consider the three uses of the word "**world**." Christ came into **our world**, but not to condemn **the world**. He came that **the world** through Him might be saved. THIS INCLUDES EVERYONE. Imagine a sign over the entrance of heaven that reads, "**Only forgiven sinners welcome**." If you're a sinner you only need be forgiven to enter heaven.
- Salvation is only through "Jesus." **There is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved**. He alone is the "**way the truth and the life. No one come to the Father, but by Him**." These verses are not very popular with a lot of people because they sound so narrow. The message would be more widely accepted if we said that Jesus is one way to come to the Father and that there are many other ways as well. But that isn't what it says. THESE WORDS OF OUR LORD ARE BOTH AN INVITATION AND A WARNING. GOD WANTS EVERYONE TO BE SAVED, BUT THERE IS A CONDITION THAT HAS TO BE MET FOR THIS TO HAPPEN – WE HAVE TO TRULY BELIEVE IN JESUS, THAT HIS SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS PAID THE FULL PENALTY OF OUR SIN AND THROUGH FAIT IN HIM WE CAN HAVE LIFE.

The story is told of how in the old west, a young man of fifteen shot and killed another man in a fit of anger. The judge who had jurisdiction over the crime sentenced him to die. But because he was so young, some of the town's people went to the judge and begged for mercy. **He consented but only on the condition the pardon would be delivered by the local preacher in the pages of a Bible**. A few days before he was to be hung, the young man noticed the preacher approaching his cell, but before the man of God could hand over the Bible with the pardon in it, the young fellow made it clear in no uncertain terms that he had no interest in what the pastor had to share. The pastor pleaded for the condemned man to hear him out but to no avail. Finally, he left. **Afterward, the guard explained that the preacher had come to offer a pardon but sadly he rejected it**. Two days later as he stood on the gallows, the young man asked to speak. To the crowd who mourned his fate, he said, "**I'm dying today not because**

I killed a man, but because I rejected the pardon." Listen, these verses are saying that you don't have to die for your sins. Christ is willing to be your Savior, but you have to take Him up on His offer. That's really good news no matter how you say it.