



Sermon Growth Guide

April 7, 2024

Love Eternal



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All for Love - Love Eternal

John 3:22-36

Key Verse: 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 them.”

Big Idea: Eternal life doesn’t merely begin when we die. It is a gift given in Christ - here and now!

Foundations

At the end of John 3, we find John the Baptist with laser-like focus. This man, this voice that once cried “prepare the way” is now fading into the background. For the One he’s been waiting for has arrived. It’s time for Jesus to take His place on center stage.

Acknowledging the fullness of the moment, John can’t help himself but to rejoice. As the bridegroom arrives to claim His bride, John (the Best Man) steps aside, not with a longing for significance, but with a full tank of joy in his heart! John’s love of Jesus is so consuming, he gladly turns over all that he is to receive the gift of seeing Jesus’ life and ministry rise.

As we button up our sermon series **All For Love** this week, we live forward in the afterglow of Easter, reminded that eternal life is knowing Jesus and the power of His resurrection – here and now! As Jesus increases, so does our joy!

Understanding God’s Word

What seems to be the presenting threat to the ministry of John the Baptist (vs. 25-26)?

How is John the Baptist’s response toward Jesus’ appearing (vs. 27-30) different than Nicodemus’s response to Jesus’ words (vs. 4 & 9)?

Applying God’s Word

How does John the Baptist’s humility in acknowledging Jesus’ superiority serve as an example for us today? How might John’s statement about Jesus increasing and himself decreasing reflect the nature of discipleship? How does John’s message about belief in the Son leading to eternal life contrast with the consequences of rejecting Jesus?

Witnessing God’s Word

John Ortberg writes, “Salvation isn’t about getting you into heaven but about getting heaven into you.” Where in your life might you be called to decrease that the Lord’s increase might be experienced? Pray to Jesus personally and for others in your community.

Today is a very unique day in the life of our congregation. We find ourselves in the afterglow of the resurrection, celebrating the gift of eternal life as we remember these beloved folks whose names we just read moments ago. It's hard to believe, but today we scrolled 46 names.

I can remember the first year I came here to the church I didn't know anyone on the list, so I wasn't emotionally invested yet. But now that I've been here 15 years, I'm finding my emotions are more engaged. Many of those folks we just scrolled through—I (along with John and Pat) have had the privilege of knowing and walking alongside—some of them even in their final days of life.

The loss of these people is a REAL loss. And while grieving the loss of a loved one is something that ALL of us eventually go through, death is still a hard thing. Death is still a REAL thing. And yet what is also very REAL this morning is that Jesus conquered it. And even death cannot separate us from His love.

The end of Romans 8, one of my favorites—can we read and declare this together?

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

Today, we're wrapping up our sermon series **All for Love**. And today we're reminded that the Lord's love is eternal.

To have eternal life means that you are in Christ and to be in Christ means that you are in the eternal love of God. Many things pass away, but the love of God goes on forever and ever. What would it look like for us to live forward with the eternal love of God resting on the frontal lobe of our mind? It's where we want to be.

But there's a problem. You and I suffer from something. SSTML. Know what that stands for? “Spiritual Short-term Memory Loss!” We can't help ourselves. The heavenly things of God—as soon as they get in there, they seem to just dump out the back of our head! When we forget about eternal things, earthly things are all that's left. Often times, those earthly things can easily become ultimate things.

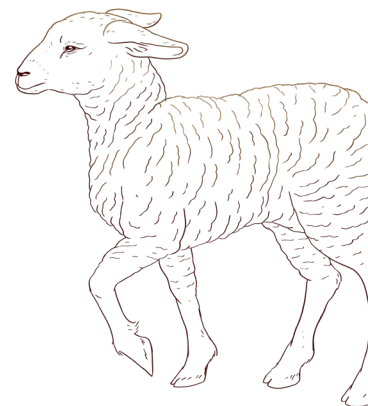
A helpful reminder has already been given, and you may not have given it any thought yet but one day, your name will be on that screen. One day, you will die – and the only thing that will appear up there will be your name. No earthly accolades, awards or accomplishments. Just your name. Why? Because in the end, in the moment when you finally exchange this life for the next, the only thing that will matter is that you are eternally loved by the eternal God, and that your name has been written in His book of life.

Now I'm gonna start into this text and as I do, you're going to notice pretty quick a problem. John the Baptist is baptizing, and his ministry has become quite substantial. But the spotlight starts to shift away from what he's doing. Everyone is leaving him...and they're going somewhere else. Read John 3:22-36.

At first, the scene seems to open up pretty nice—Judean countryside... lots of water...two groups baptizing, John the Baptist and his disciples over here, Jesus and his disciples over there... seems pleasant. But then, an argument over “ceremonial washing” flares up. An argument over baptism. (Isn't it great to know that those don't happen anymore?)

We don't know details about this discussion—The text doesn't tell us. What we do know is that people are leaving John and going to Jesus. And so, John's disciples come to him troubled:

“Hey John, we got a problem here. Our numbers are dropping; things are starting to dry up.” It'd be like, “That hip,



new church with that new pastor that moved into town...people are leaving here and going there. In fact, it seems that everyone is leaving here, and going there! What do we do? What are you going to do?

Can you imagine John the Baptist in this moment? In our culture today losing followers, losing customers, losing clients, and losing fans is terrible. What can John do to get them back? “Oh man. Yeah, this is no good! Let’s double down our engagement efforts. We really need to send out an Instagram blast. Or gosh—weren’t they selling fireworks down the road at Eli’s house...maybe we could attract them back here by shooting them over the water.”

No. Nothing of the sort comes from the mouth of John the Baptist. What does come out of his mouth in verses 27-30 is totally unexpected. If it’s true that “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks,” we get a good glimpse as to what is in the heart of this man.

Watch, verse 27: “To this John replied, ‘A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.’”

John has a heavenly perspective. Do you see that? “A person can receive only what is given them from heaven.” And John knows the advancement of the kingdom of God is not something to be achieved, but to be received. “Guys, I’m not here to worry about declining numbers or achieve ministry success. I’m just a man with his hands wide open to receive whatever comes my way. Nothing more...nothing less. In fact,

“You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’” So why would you think there’s some sort of competition going on here?

Earlier in chapter 1, John shows up on the scene, obviously making a pretty big splash and so he’s questioned - “Are you the Messiah?” And John would say, “Not only am I not the Messiah...

I’m not Elijah (as some of you think I am)...

I’m not the Prophet (as some of you think I am)...

You want to know who I am? I’m the guy who’s not worthy to untie that man’s shoes!”

John knows that to be an achiever in this moment would be totally out of line. To compete against the very thing he’s been preparing for—why would he do that? “Everyone is going to Him.” What else can he do but receive wholeheartedly what’s now happening before his very eyes!

It would be just like a best man waiting for a wedding to begin. Look at verse 29.

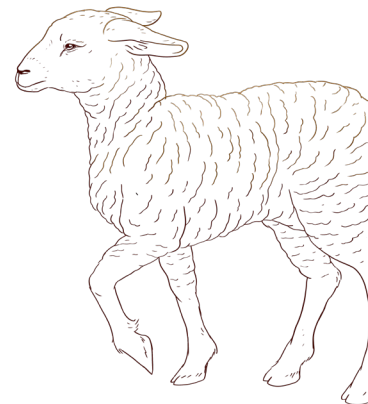
John sees himself as the best man in a wedding that is about to take place. From where he is: He can hear the processional music beginning to play. Peoples’ heads all turn toward center isle as the bride walks toward her groom. All eyes are on her and the groom who’s waiting for her.

No one is looking at John. In fact, no one is paying any attention to him at all. They’re all leaving him and going to Jesus. And how’s he feeling about it? Thrilled!

John the Baptist...this voice in the wilderness that once cried, “Prepare the way of the Lord,” has now heard the Voice he’s been waiting for. It’s the voice of the Good Shepherd, he can hear it now just across the way.

That Voice, when it calls out to his sheep, they know it and they come (John 10)

That Voice, that will soon call out to a dead man- “Lazarus, come forth!” -and the dead man hears him... and walks out alive (John 11)



This is a totally different voice that has entered the scene and when John hears it, his joy rises to complete joy! Even as he fades into the background.

At this moment, John fades into the background. In fact, we won't hear from him again, but for John, it's the way it MUST be. And so he concludes with:

“He must become greater; I must become less.”

Think of this: when you give credit to others, it never costs you anything. When you choose to become less, and make the increase of another your focus, everyone wins! When you make your aim to what one pastor calls “bending the light” to others, not only does a person receive the gift of encouragement, but you receive the gift of joy! Everyone wins.

One of the names we read earlier, I know you saw it, was actually another John; John Stevens. This service of reading the names was his idea, as he wanted to make sure the spotlight on Christ's resurrection continued strong into the following Sunday. John pastored this church from 1969-2005, and this church (and even this city) wouldn't be where it is today without John doing what he did and being who he was. But in 2005, John faced retirement and after devoting himself to this place for over 36 years, he was called to lay it all down.

Nevertheless, when he did finally retire, I've learned that John wasn't so much about preserving his ministry into the future so much as he was about making room for the Lord's ministry. But he knew that in order to do that, he would have to become less and make room for others. In fact, I learned that on Sundays, John – who used to lead from the front, would sit on the second-to-back row; never wanting to be in the spotlight but giving room for others to do great things. He was all about pointing to the work of Jesus and supporting those who were still in ministry. Never wanting to get in the way.

I want you to prayerfully consider this week: Where am I called to “bend the light?” How

must I go down, so that someone else can go up? Is it in your marriage, a relationship at work, a brother or a sister... What would it look like if we did this? There's great joy to be had in this endeavor.

At the end of the day, friends, who you are becoming has everything to do with who you belong to. And even at the end of your life, who you will become has everything to do with who you belong to:

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.”

When we come, and we put our faith in Jesus, when we know Him and are known by Him, we get eternal life! And notice what it says: “whoever believes in the Son HAS eternal life. Not WILL HAVE one day, later down the road when I die but HAS now—in the moment—real time eternal life! Eternal life is a galactic-sized gift that is given the moment the eternal God of eternal love calls to you and says, “I love you! You belong to me! Believe this. Will you receive it this morning?”

Our last generation Z question: “Am I Loved?”

More than you know. You're the bride of Christ; He loves nothing more, to the point that He would give His life for you.

As we close this series, and as we come to the table, I want to leave you with part of a prayer the Apostle Paul had for his friends long ago, but it's my prayer for you to.

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Amen.

