

Title: ON THE BRINK OF BELIEF, JOHN 3:1-17
(Chatham, NJ; 03/16/14, AM) [E – Exegesis]

Theme: Above all other things, the love of God changes hearts and inspires people to believe.

Purpose: To encourage the audience to let God's love into their hearts and by believing this can commence to allow Him to change them.

Introduction:

1. Begin in verse sixteen: think of God's love as a horizon around which all else becomes a part of the view or a canvas that provides the background of the painting.
2. I know the people who used to put up signs of John 3:16 in the end zone are well-meaning, but I think it may have trivialized the love of God for some people.
3. Maybe this world of hatred and cynicism just trivializes the love of God!
4. We must never underestimate the power of God's love.
5. Never underestimate the power of us demonstrating his love for others.
6. For those who are even in the least way contemplating belief, John 3:1-17 has some exhortations for you.

I. Don't Be Afraid to Walk Away from the Darkness

- A. Jesus knew what was in man, 2:23
 1. Darkness in the human heart
 2. People loved darkness because their deeds were evil, 3:19
 3. They feared exposure to the light, 3:20
 4. For many it has resulted in blindness to their own evil
 5. Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"
- B. Nicodemus came under the cover of darkness, 2
 1. Did he fear his companions in the ruling council?
 2. Was he afraid of losing his reputation or position?
 3. He tried to inject some integrity into the council, 7:50-51
 4. He also helped bury Christ, John 19:39.
 5. I think he was a man trying, in difficult times, to walk in the light.

II. Changing Lifelong Behaviors Demands God's Power, Not Your Own

- A. Born "from above" perhaps better than "born again"
 1. Nicodemus cannot understand how a person can return to his mother's womb, 4
 2. He confuses natural birth with spiritual birth
 3. NOTE: address the issue of water being the water of birth rather than baptism
 4. The emphasis of this discussion is on the power of the Holy Spirit
 5. The Holy Spirit does not operate under the parameters of the natural world though Jesus compares it to the nature of the blowing wind
 6. Nicodemus still doesn't understand, 9
- B. Earthly vs. Heavenly
 1. Jesus elevates the discussion to heavenly matters, 10-13
 2. He always moves his discussions in John toward spiritual matters
 3. It is because of spiritual things that Jesus can offer forgiveness to a sinful woman and not so much to a Pharisee, Luke 7:36-50.
 4. The Pharisee cannot see beyond what she was to see what God can and wants to do for her.
 5. He cannot see the love of God for this "sinner."

III. Focus Your Eyes on the Cross

A. History of a religious relic

1. It may seem odd that a statue of a serpent could somehow represent Christ
2. Numbers 21:9 – Moses makes a bronze serpent on a pole to heal Israel of the plague of snakes
3. The point of comparison is two-fold: the serpent was lifted up, the people who looked at it were healed
4. Be careful of imposters: in 2 Kings 18:4 people mistakenly had continued to offer sacrifices to this relic centuries later
5. Only Jesus provides healing because only he has been ordained by God

B. The Cross is the real thing

1. Jesus will be lifted up, John 12:34
2. The cross is the culmination of salvation history
3. It represents the highest demonstration of God's love

Conclusions:

1. Believing and fully trusting in the kindness and love of God is the very first step that leads to the miraculous change within us.
2. Does not the cross epitomize the love of God, Jn. 3:16?
3. Story of therapist – “Three Spheres” by Laura Slater in *You Can't Make This Stuff Up* by Lee Gutkind, p. 151.
4. Love in its many forms is the nature and power of God.
5. God loved us by giving his Son to die for us, John 3:16.
6. Believe that God loves you: this is the first step.
7. Until you take this step, you are still on the brink of faith.
8. Believe that His Son died for you.
9. Become a child of his by repenting and being baptized in order to be born from above.
10. The only thing you have to lose is the darkness in your own heart, but you gain eternal life.