

July 7, 2019 Faith Is Like The Canadian Shield John 3:16-19

“Rock of ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee. Let the water and the blood, From thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure; Cleanse me from its guilt and power.” The hymn reflects what the Bible teaches us. The Lord God, revealed in HIS Son Jesus Christ and present with un in HIS Holy Spirit is like rock in a world of shifting sand. We are looking this summer at faith that is akin to bedrock. An hour north of here where we worship you can see the Canadian Shield along highway 7 and on up to Bancroft erupting out of the earth. Old rock, hard rock, rock that does not quake, a solid foundation. We are looking at solid and sound doctrines on which our faith in Jesus rests.

It begins with what on the surface appears to be a hard word. We are lost in our sin. Not sort of lost. Not partially lost. We are lost. No buts, no ands, no exceptions. What this means is that we cannot save ourselves from our sin, no matter what we do. We cannot work our way out of it. We cannot buy our way out of it. What made Martin Luther so angry at the church of which he was a part was the willingness to sell paper declaration to the poorest of the poor, and the richest of the rich alike guaranteeing them a get out of hell card. Martin Luther had read the New Testament, grounded in the Old, and he knew, and knew that some in the church knew, that is not what the Scriptures teach. No matter how noble our works, and especially faith based works, their ability to save us from

our sin means nothing. We are lost. That is our sin's self inflicted power. No argument will change that reality. No additional considerations or projects will change that truth. We are lost.

Secondly we have taken note that God has chosen us for salvation. I like the Canadian coin metaphor. The coin toss with which football games begin, remind us coins have a head side and a tail side. The head side of this coin is that God chooses us for redemption. He does not want us to be lost. The tail side, the human side of the coin, is that we make the very human decision to follow Jesus. Peter and the the rest of the 12 made that decision. The crowd of close to 120 who followed Jesus from Galilee to Calvary, made that decision. You and I have made that decision. That is why we are here on this hot summer morning. But the divine reality is Peter and the 12, the Galilean crowd, and we have this in common: before ever we made our human decision, God chose to redeem us. He chose to lead us and urge us and show us the way to Jesus. I was convinced that Mrs. Brown in Port Arthur on Shipley Street was an angel of God, leading me to Jesus. She was convinced that God had made her responsible for my spiritual development. Both sides of that reality reflect that God had chosen me, as HE has chosen you to be saved. If you really want to understand that read the Scriptures, pray and sing songs of praise. And at the end of the day you will still find yourself asking with Kris Kristopherson, "Why me Lord? What

have I ever done to deserve even one, of the blessings you give.”

Today we come to the 3rd of these basic, rock like doctrines. We also begin what I call the series within the series. The person of Jesus Christ is simply too important to deal with in a single message. But this 3rd granite like statement of faith is simply, we are saved through faith in Jesus who died on Calvary’s cross. I am sure some wish I would add and rose again the 3rd day, the Sunday of the next week, the first day of the next week. As I said, you just cannot deal with the person of Jesus and say much of what must be said in a single message. Today we deal with we are saved through faith in Jesus who died on Calvary’s cross.

There are a number of elements in that single statement. The disciple John deals with them better than I ever could but you will see how his writing and teaching fits with what I have been saying so far in this series. See where he starts in the 16th verse of John chapter 3. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in HIM should not perish but have everlasting life.” That statement puts everything in the 4 gospel accounts in perspective. They are not about an attempt to create a religion. They are not about creating a church that would rival superpowers, Empires, and their governments. The Gospels are about what God has done and is doing. In cosmic terms HE loves the world too much to let us destroy ourselves. HE gave

His one and only Son, in order that people might not perish. Why did Jesus turn water into wine in Cana? Because God loves the world even at a wedding. No detail of life is too small for His failing to care about the saving of lives, which is the saving of souls. It starts with God loving us no matter what we believe about that, no matter what we think about that, no matter what we do or do not do about that. He loves you. He loves you if you believe. He loves your friends and your enemies even if they do not recognize HIS existence. And no matter what they do. HE loves them. HE loves you. HE loves your family. HE loves your friends. HE gave Jesus to the world, in all its complexity and contradictions, to save people from their sin.

There is a human component to this mystery of God's love. Response. Whether you read in the Old Testament or the New, God is always looking for, desiring one response. HE wants us to believe. Believing in Jesus we come to recognize who HE is. Who the Father is! Who the Holy Spirit is!! Who our neighbours are. And of course, who our brothers and sisters are. I would never have understood any of those things had I not decided to follow Jesus. To believe in HIM, and the Father, and the Spirit, and the Church, and the desperate need of the world to be as I am, except for my age and my weakness. John 3:16 says God loves the world, and that when we believe we receive eternal life no matter what appears to happen in time and space.

John 3:17 says something that is important. God did not send Jesus into the world that the Romans might fry in hell. Nor the Sanhedrin. HE did not come to judge Nicodemus, who had trouble with understanding how this salvation thing works. Jesus came to save Nicodemus. And you. And me. And our neighbours. And our enemies. The kindest people we have ever met, and the unkindest people we know. God loves us and them. He wants us all to discover the changed life that comes through faith in Jesus.

John 3:18 and 19 are important. Verse 18 says that the choice we make concerning Jesus is really important. A yes leads to the faith life with all its joys and challenges, and our being an adopted child of God. A no leaves us with the emptiness we choose. Reading verse 18 no one can say, my choice does not really matter. God's choice, giving us Jesus comes from HIS never wanting us to say no, and the discovery of just how cold life can be.

Verse 19 closes the circle. Because of the power of sin God loved us so much that HE gave us HIS Son. Here John declares that the Lord God Almighty is under no illusion about the power of sin and the reality of darkness. And the truth is, people can and did look into the very eyes of Jesus and chose to live in the darkness simply because they preferred evil deeds to the life of light.

We are saved through faith in Jesus who died in our place on Calvary's cross. And once again we can add the words...no buts, no ands, no exceptions.

Let us pray;

The words of the prayer this morning are from the hymn we sing at what I call our formal communion services...at least 4 times a year. It is the 5th verse of 543 in our Book of Praise, "Here O MY Lord, I See Thee Face To Face. Let us Pray: Precious, redeeming, Lord;

We have no help but Thine, nor do we need/ another arm, but Thine to lean upon. It is enough O Lord, enough indeed, our strength is in Thy might, Thy might alone.

Amen.