

We Want You Here Series Discussion Guides

April - June 2023

Week 1 - Easter Sunday



WE WANT YOU HERE

WE WANT YOU HERE
CHURCH OF THE CITY NEW YORK

Teaching Text

1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-28, 32

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. ...

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. ...

If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Sermon Recap

This Easter Sunday, Pastor Jon preached on how the resurrection of Jesus proves that death is not the end. The resurrection is an all or nothing proposition— if Jesus rose from the dead, then we can believe everything He says and live with full hope. If He did not rise from the dead, then we are people "worthy of pity," as Paul says. Ultimately, the resurrection is the most credible, surprising explanation for what happened to Jesus and the resulting spread of Christianity. It is the best explanation for the empty tomb, for the martyrdom of the apostles, for the rise of the church in the Roman Empire, and for centuries of billions of people professing Christ as their King.

The resurrection gives us staggering hope for this life and for the future. By rising from the grave, Jesus not only fulfills the greatest longings of the human heart, but He points to the redemption of all things to come. There's something in us that knows life, even at its best, feels too short. Even our most perfect day on earth is just a glimpse of what's to come in the new creation. The promise we cling to is that Christ came as a human man into the middle of our story, lived a perfect life, died as a sacrifice for our sins, has risen from the dead, and will grant us new bodies at the redemption of all things. His resurrection also addresses our desire for evil to be punished and for justice to come, allowing us an assurance that the joy in store for the people of God is great.

Finally, the resurrection requires a response from us. We should examine it, struggle and wrestle with the fact that we will live forever, and surrender to this truth so that we can live in light of Jesus's resurrection. The Christian life is about readjusting our entire selves around Jesus. Despite the rise and fall of empires and ideologies, the story of Jesus is still, and always will be, breathtakingly credible and satisfying.

Discussion Questions

Connect

1. Everyone take turns saying one thing they really admire/enjoy about the person sitting on their left.

Character

Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-28, 32 aloud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stood out to you?
2. What truth(s) do you learn about Jesus in this passage?

Consider

1. Pastor Jon mentioned how the resurrection gives us hope by making three claims: the victory of life over deserved death, the finality of God's divine justice over evil, and lastly, the resurrection of our souls to an eternal celebration after the end of our time on earth. Which of these claims caught your attention the most and why?
2. Pastor Jon touched upon how the story of the resurrection is the most surprising but credible explanation for the events that occurred between Easter morning and Christ's ascension to be reunited with the Father, and then the thousands of years of Christianity that followed. Today, the world tries to say that Jesus' story is not factual, but part of some people's value systems, while Paul argued that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are facts, not subjective emotional experiences. How can you live/act in a way that declares our faith as factual and not just an emotional choice?
3. We were challenged at the end of this sermon to respond to the resurrection story by examining it, struggling with it, and surrendering to Jesus. What issues have you yet to examine, struggle with, and surrender to Jesus in your personal walk of faith?

Cover

Practice a 2-3 minute sharing of the gospel based on the teaching text and Pastor Jon's main points. Breakout into pairs, share, and then give any helpful feedback. Come back together and pray for opportunities to share the gospel as you go throughout your week.

Week 2 - Praying the Word

Teaching Text

2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 5:39-40

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." -2 Timothy 3:16-17

"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." -John 5:39-40

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Sam continued our sermon series by encouraging us to spend time in the Bible, as a way to show God that we want Him here. We tend to view the Bible through various lenses—for some, it's confusion, for others, doubt, and for others, anxiety. Pastor Sam helped us understand how we can move from these approaches to Scripture to places of clarity, confidence, and rest. We are able to rest in God when we have clarity and confidence about who He is, which comes from studying the Bible with the help of the Holy Spirit.

To go from confusion to clarity about who God is, we need to immerse ourselves in Scripture. We should come to the Bible expecting to encounter God, trusting that He desires for us to know Him. We often approach the Bible with preconceived ideas about who God is, so it is critical that we read the whole book, inviting the Holy Spirit into our study time, and asking Him to help us have an integrated understanding of the Old and New Testaments. In addition, to become true reflections of God's heart and character, we need to submit ourselves to the authority of Scripture, guided by the words of Psalm 86:11, asking God to "unite [our] hearts to fear [His] name."

Faith is an integral part of learning to move from doubt to confidence about God's character. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that faith is a necessary part of pleasing God and enjoying a life of closeness with Him. However, as we spend significant time in

God's Word, we will experience dissonance between what we read there and what we see in the world around us. Because of this, praying God's Word back to Him is a helpful practice to move us towards a confident assurance about His character.

We can confidently rest in God when we understand who He is, as He has revealed himself to us in Scripture. Pastor Sam shared three helpful points to invite us out of anxiety and into rest. We can love God's Word and ask Him to enliven this love in us, make room for the Word by creating space for it in our lives, and integrate the Word and prayer by praying Scripture back to God. As we develop in these areas as a community, we are reminded that this internal growth must flow outward, so that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

Discussion Questions

Connect

What are your favorite activities to do when the weather gets warmer in New York?

Character

Ask someone to read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and another person to read John 5:39-40 out loud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stood out to you?
2. What do you learn about God's character from these verses?

Consider

1. Pastor Sam talked about the tone of God's voice and how it is important to not only hear what God says, but also hear what He says in the right tone. Take a moment to imagine God speaking to you through our sermon teaching texts. How would you describe His tone?

2. When you think about your approach to reading the word of God, which of the following have you wrestled with more: (1) moving from confusion to clarity (2) moving from doubt to confidence or (3) moving from anxiety to rest?

3. As discussed during the sermon, we should approach the Word of God with the expectation that we will have an encounter with Him. Let's encourage each other

by sharing a moment in which we personally encountered God through His word. What did that moment teach you about the character of God?

Cover

Spend time meditating on 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and John 5:39-40. Using words from Scripture, pray that God gives us a hunger and thirst for His Word. Pray that as we approach His word with the expectation to encounter Him, that God reveals Himself to us within the verses, chapters, and books of the Bible. Then, cover personal prayer requests as people feel led to share.

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Week 3 - Prayer, Grief, & Lament

Teaching Text

Habakkuk 3:16-19

“I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Suzy continued our "We Want You Here" series by discussing prayer, grief, and lament. Our modern American culture—and even the Western Church—struggles to grieve rightly, instead choosing to numb, avoid, or dismiss pain in our own lives, the lives of others, and in our world. However, it's important to enter into the brokenness around us, because God's Word tells us there are times to mourn, and even Jesus Himself wept and lamented. In ancient Israel, the role of the prophet was to know God's heart, and know how God was grieving over the sin and injustice of the world. The prophet was meant to express this lament publicly. Jesus took up the ultimate prophetic lament and wore the sins of the world on His own body.

We can only join God in the restoration of the world if we enter into the brokenness. The prayer of the prophet Habakkuk serves as a model for our own prayers, as it contains three important elements: the cry, the choice, and the conclusion. The cry consists of honestly calling out to God in suffering and waiting for His response, knowing that He promises to draw near. The choice involves choosing to rejoice because we know who God is, we know He hears us, and He promises His presence. We can choose to raise our hands in grief, choose to be generous in suffering, choose to keep living in pain. Lastly, at the conclusion of any prayer of desperation, God is the one who strengthens, transforms, enables, and

gives. Habakkuk points to God's promise to make our feet like that of the deer who can climb the most precarious mountains because of the way He's designed their feet to move on cliffs. God does not always remove the mountains of grief and hardship, but instead gives us the ability to scale them, allowing them to become ebezers His faithfulness, places where we can make our home.

Discussion Questions

Connect

1. What was something that made you sad when you were a kid?

Character

Ask someone to read Habakkuk 3:16-19 out loud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stood out to you?
2. What does Habakkuk's prayer reveal about the way God delivers both mercy and justice?

Consider

1. Pastor Suzy mentioned three parts to Habakkuk's prayer: The cry out of grief for God's mercy, the choice to persevere in faith and obedience, and the conclusion of God's presence and grace. Which of these is the most difficult for you in prayer?
2. What seasons or situations of hardship that, through persevering faith, God used to "change your feet" (or make you stronger)?
3. What comforts or challenges you about the reality that sometimes the conclusion of God's faithfulness may not come within your lifetime?

Cover

Using Habakkuk 3 as an example, spend time considering what your prayers of lament would be, and share with the group. Then, write out one prayer to God that expresses your collective lament to Him.

Week 4 - Resisting Temptation

Teaching Text

James 1:12-18

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”

Sermon Recap

Pastor Jon continued our current sermon series 'We Want You Here' with a deep dive into our human struggle with temptation. He addressed the sources of temptation (the adversary, the world's system, and our flesh) while emphasizing the difference between a trial and a temptation. The first is used by God as a way to increase our capacity and dependence on Him, while the latter is a result of the fall and the sin that the enemy wants to use to separate us from God. The enemy utilizes a variety of worldly idols such as money, sex, vanity, people pleasing, and social media, to tempt our hearts into sinful behaviors through the lie that we can 'manage it.' Yet it is consistently clear that when we are tempted by sinful desires, we can be led into deception and justification of the sin until we decide to act, ultimately creating a disobedience in us that leads to spiritual death and separation from God.

However, God will always provide a way for us to resist our flesh and the temptations of this world. We can practice 1) Identity Resistance by aligning with the truth of what God says about us instead of the voice of the accuser, 2) Spiritual Violence by praying violently against the spiritual forces at play, while being gentle with the person presenting the temptation, and 3) Remembering God's Goodness

by mediating on His promises and faithfulness. We can choose the path of temptation that leads to pain and death, or we can commit to the path the Lord provides that fills us with Kingdom desire, leads us to truth in who we are, and provides spiritual growth that moves us forward into our destiny of achieving glory for God. As we resist temptation and actively confess by bringing things into the light, shame melts away under the power of the cross. God rewards us with a new name in Christ, the affirmation of heaven, and the increased ability to walk into our purpose on earth with freedom and authority.

Discussion Questions

Connect

What has been your favorite memory from Community Group this season?

Character

Ask someone to read James 1:12-18 out loud. Then, ask the following questions:

1. What words, images, or phrases stood out to you?
2. Based on these verses, what are the results of giving into temptation compared to the result of resisting it?

Consider

1. Who does God say you are when it comes to temptation and sin? What truth can you cling to so that His voice of affirmation is louder than the voice of the Accuser?
2. How can you remind yourself of God's goodness in times of temptation this week?
3. What sins in your life do you need to put to death (Romans 8:13)?

Cover

Spend time listening to the Holy Spirit individually, asking if there is any temptation or sin in your life that needs to be confessed. Then, if you are comfortable (this can be done in smaller groups as well) spend time confessing to the Lord together. Cover these confessions in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to come in strength and power to help you resist temptation.

Week 5 - How We Fight Our Battles

Teaching Text

Exodus 17:8-16

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven." Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. He said, "Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Ralph Castillo continued our "We Want You Here" series with his sermon, "This is How We Fight Our Battles." Learning from the story of the Israelites' victory over the Amalekites in Exodus, we observe three key ways that we, as believers, should fight our battles: (1) We fight for people who are in a fight (2) We fight together for people who are in a fight, and (3) We celebrate the victory—God's way.

The account of this story in Deuteronomy reveals that the Amalekites attacked God's people when they were weary and worn out. Like the Israelites, we also have a ruthless, relentless, and opportunistic enemy who seeks to exploit our weaknesses, but we cannot fight and strategize against an enemy we are unaware of. As believers, our strategy and strength is found in the sacred obligation of intercessory prayer, and we see this modeled through Moses' actions in the battle. After instructing Joshua to gather reinforcements and enter into the fight, Moses

goes up onto a hill with his own reinforcements to intercede on the army's behalf by holding up the rod of God. When Moses gets weary of holding up the rod of God and maintaining the intercessory necessary for victory, Aaron and Hur keep his hands lifted and steady. They display the reality that even when our physical position must change, our spiritual position must stay the same until the fight ends, but we cannot fight alone; we must fight with and within community. Finally, through the victory of the Israelites, God instructs us how to celebrate His way when we achieve victory. Just as God instructed Moses to write, repeat, and share his testimony, He calls us to do the same. We must make a habit of testifying of the goodness of the Lord to the next generation, so that rather than boasting in our own strength, we may make it known that Jesus is our source.

Jesus intended for His house to be called a house of prayer, and for His people to follow in His footsteps of intercession. Right now, Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for us, and we can rest in the truth that Jesus is the One who fights for us. Just as Jesus' prayers allowed Peter's faith to prevail, His prayers over us today have sealed our victory. As believers, we can be confident that when we fight, we do not fight for victory, that instead, we fight from victory because we serve a victorious God.

Week 6 - Praying Through Tears

Teaching Text

Luke 19:41-42

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon continued our "We Want You Here" series with a teaching on prayer through tears. Our world is a fallen place, and it has become the cultural norm to be cynical and numb to the pain, injustice, and sin that surrounds us. However, not only has God never gone numb to the world, He invites us to weep our way back to the tenderness of His heart.

Pastor Jon focused in on the sacredness of tears we see all throughout the scriptures, and how they served as evidence of someone being in tune with the heart of the Father. Whether our tears come as a consequence to our own sin and spiritual failure, as a response against the world's rejection and rebellion against God, or as a cry of love for someone we want to see grow in faith, God receives and cares for our tears. Tears are often a sign of coming breakthrough through prayer, because it signifies a willingness and ability to share in the burden's of God's heart.

We can cultivate the gift of tears in our lives by asking the Holy Spirit to help us see with fresh eyes, breaking us out of a cynical nature, by moving slowly through our days and asking the Holy Spirit to reveal where Jesus wants to extend compassion, and by asking for our feelings and experiences to be dictated by God's heart, not our preferences. As God's people, we should move towards a life of tears until we are so fully immersed in the broken human condition, that we can pray with weeping for the Kingdom of God to come.

Week 7 - Joining the Chorus

Teaching Text

Psalm 148

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created, and he established them for ever and ever— he issued a decree that will never pass away. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. And he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants, of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the Lord.

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Suzy continued our series “We Want You Here” with a teaching on joining in creation’s chorus of praise through Psalm 148. As created beings, we are meant to praise our creator, but humanity has continuously elevated ‘the self’ as the one who should be praised. This idea has led believers to often wrestle with the reality that we ought to praise God, because we want our praise to be optional, based on our own conditions, or even shared with ourselves. However, this position wrongly orients us before our God, who is always the only one worthy of praise.

God is the Creator and Sustainer of all creation, forming everything and holding it all together by the declaration of His Word. He is also the Redeemer and Judge of all humanity and all the earth, and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is reconciling all things back to Himself. It is God’s will for us to praise Him in all circumstances, and these truths are sufficient enough reasons to praise Him without ceasing. Mankind was created in God’s image and entrusted us with the stewardship of the earth, to lead creation in an endless song of praise to the

Creator. And though we live in a fallen world where praise must be an active choice of obedience, the day is coming where Jesus will return to usher in the Kingdom of God, and a new song of praise will break out among all that's been redeemed.

Today, we are invited to join the chorus of praise that is happening right now in heaven and in creation. Praise unhindered by circumstances and feelings puts us in the right position before God, and allows us to live out our true purpose as His beloved creation.

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Week 8 - Compassion Sunday

Teaching Text

Jeremiah 9:23

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, we were joined by Compassion International, and Pastor Jon preached a special sermon on biblical justice. When we love someone, we want to delight them, and this is what delights God: steadfast love, righteousness, and justice (Jeremiah 9:23-24). While secular justice is a materialistic framework centered around the struggle for power and classical justice centers around a fair society, Christian justice is theological, eschatological, and Christological. This means Christian justice starts with God and affirms everyone is worthy of justice because they are made in God's image; it believes that everything is moving toward God's coming Kingdom; and it is shaped by the person of Jesus.

Throughout the Bible, God's vision is that the people with more power and resources should show compassion to the vulnerable. Jesus Himself shows disproportionate concern for cultural outsiders and the poor, reflecting the delights of God's heart. Our own hearts are not designed to carry all the suffering of the world at once; only Jesus can do that. Therefore, where do we start with practicing justice? The Bible points us to start with our neighbor, whoever is in front of us with a need, and the vulnerable.

The most vulnerable among us are children, and children matter to Jesus. During His ministry on earth, He blessed them and proclaimed the Kingdom belongs to children and those who become like children. Compassion International is a child-development ministry dedicated to releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name. Through sponsorships and donations, they empower local churches to

provide individualized and holistic care to children in poverty so they are free to learn, grow, play and dream.

During Pastor Jon's sermon, Compassion alum Keewani Cook shared her powerful testimony about her own childhood, in which she grew up in poverty in the Philippines and often went to bed hungry. One day, her dad came home from a crusade where he heard the Gospel and received Jesus as his Savior, and Keewani's family began attending church. At first, Keewani couldn't immediately reconcile a good Jesus with her personal suffering. But then, after registering with Compassion International, she was sponsored by someone in Australia who told her she was fearfully and wonderfully made. Keewani learned that poverty was not her destiny. She began to read her Bible and believe that God's word was true. God provided a way for Keewani to go to school and start a career, and she ultimately learned—through another's compassion—that nothing is impossible for the Lord.

Through stories like Keewani's, we see that what we do for the least of these, we do for Jesus. God wants image-bearers to steward the earth properly and to be like Jesus in the world. When people ask, "Is Christianity good or bad for the world?", that might not be the right question. Jesus was good for the world, but God has chosen to entrust His mission with His people. Therefore, the better question is this: will God's people be the hands and feet of Jesus? Will we be good for the world?

Week 9 - The God Who Seeks & Saves

Teaching Text

Luke 15:1-7

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Ashley Anderson continued our "We Want You Here" series with a message on joining God on His mission to seek and save the lost through prayer. Jesus told numerous parables focused on "lost" things or people when critiquing the religious elite and the hardness in their hearts towards those who were far from God. While "the lost" might be a term that makes us uncomfortable in our modern context, Jesus used it as a defense of worth and belonging. By saying someone was lost, He was actually implying that they had a place they were meant to be, but had only wandered off, and were worth being sought after. As God's image bearers, Jesus declared that every person has incredible value to Him whether they turn to Him or not. Lostness is an experience of the fallen world, but it was never meant to be a marker of identity.

Jesus' story of the lost sheep in Luke 15 does not follow the movement of the sheep, but of the shepherd and his singular obsession to find what has been lost. As the shepherd goes after the sheep, he must redeem every step that it has taken away by taking a step towards it, taking the care to focus on the way it would wander while also moving quickly, fully aware of its increasing vulnerability. When he finally finds the sheep, he joyfully lifts it up onto his shoulders and begins the journey back, sacrificing his comfort and ease without resentment to bring the thing he loves home. At the end of his journey, the shepherd calls his community to come rejoice

with him, for what was lost has been found. This is not just the heart of Jesus, but what He actively does as the Good Shepherd, and heaven rejoices at the recovery of the lost because it is a priority of Jesus' heart.

The gospel is a message of freedom, but many people have not yet heard or accepted its story. There are people we interact with everyday that long to be part of a story like the gospel, but we assume they are not interested because we have forgotten how shockingly good the gospel is. The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost, and restore them to their right place in His family. To join Jesus on His pursuit through prayer, we must stave off discouragement. Moves of God in certain people's lives that we long to see in the lives of people we love and pray for constantly should not be at odds with one another, but continuously encourage us that God is moving. When we pray for the lost, we must pray with faith that God can actually do anything. We must also pray with sincere love, because what we pray for we'll adore, and who we love we'll have influence with. Finally, we must pray with a bias towards action by putting our bodies where our prayers are, and be willing and ready to share the gospel and share our lives. As followers of Jesus, we are called to pray for the lost because we know what it was to be lost, and the great joy of being found.

Week 10 - Consecration in a Time of Compromise

Teaching Text

2 Timothy 2:20-21

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Sermon Recap

This Sunday, Pastor Jon closed out our “We Want You Here” series with a call to consecration. In a time of theological compromise and the normalization of godlessness, God is calling us to devote ourselves to a Person, to a purpose, and to power. Consecration means dedicating ourselves to the Lord through specific sacrificial acts. In other words, cleansing + sacrifice + dedication = consecration.

Consecration is a costly sign of devotion, a conscious choice to give up something good for something better. Consecration is the through line in the story of God and His people. Titus 2:11-14 reveals that God wants to redeem and purify us for Himself, not acting as a moral policeman looking for a criminal, but as a lover looking for His beloved. The Lord simply asks that we love Him back by resisting the culture of compromise with desperate love for Him. As the bride of Christ, our time on earth is meant to be a season of engagement, or preparation, for whole life intimacy with God. When we devote ourselves to the Lord through costly sacrifice, we exchange the trivial things of the world for the riches God’s promises, releasing of His purpose and power in and through our lives.

Today, God is seeking a generation that pursues not the American Dream, but the Consecrated Life. As New Yorkers, we tend to have a spirit of vision, risk, and hard work, but we must offer this spirit to God to pursue Godly consecration over cultural consecration. May 2023 be the Summer of Consecration— the Summer of chasing the dreams of God’s Kingdom, and exchanging that which is worthless for that which is eternal.