

May 26, 2024

IT MAY NOT ALWAYS FEEL SO, BUT YOU ARE LOVED

John 3: 1-17

Where do we begin? Where do we begin to understand ourselves, our world and our God? Where do we begin to understand our present experiences and our expectations about what is to come?

Where do we begin to understand life with its promises and possibilities, its hopes and dreams, its joys and happiness? Where do we begin to understand life with its failures and disappointments, its hurts and brokenness, its anxieties and uncertainties? And where do we begin to understand what may lie beyond death?

How do we see ourselves? Are we people who start out in life flawed and broken and who must spend our lives in pursuit of that which can help us to correct our flaws and fix our brokenness; constantly trying to be good and keep on the right path? Are we people who start out in life good and whole; who have all that it takes to live fully and independently? Are we people who can make it on our own if we are willing and have the discipline to try?

How do we see ourselves?

We all have our own ways of understanding ourselves, our experiences, and how we ought to live. Some of us see ourselves as flawed and sinful human beings, incapable of living as fully as we should. Some of us see ourselves as able and sufficient in ourselves, possessed of all that we need to pursue our dreams through a combination of discipline, sacrifice and the right environment. Some of us see ourselves as victims of forces and circumstances beyond our control, persons who can only hope that someday, life will deal us a better hand.

How do we see ourselves? More importantly: How should we see ourselves?

John 3: 16 & 17 help us to answer that question.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ‘Indeed, God did not send*

*the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

As we consider what John is saying to us about the paths that we can find ourselves going down, let us look at what is going on in our world and where things are heading.

First, let us for a moment take God out of the picture. Let us imagine that our future and that of the world, is entirely up to us. Now consider this: “If people all over, continue to act the way they do now, if nothing changes in the world; is there not a real possibility that the world will one day perish?”

As we see the continuing degradation of the environment; as human greed increases; as long as the possibility of nuclear war remains a reality; as long as hatred and intolerance remain a part of our response to others; as long as war and violence remain the preferred means of settling disputes for many; as long as those and other such things continue, is there not a real possibility that the world will one day perish? It is not about God punishing humanity, it’s about human beings continuing down a path to their own destruction.

This is not being pessimistic or alarmist or fatalistic; it just seems to be the inevitable end if we don’t change course. But there is good news! In John 3:16, our attention is drawn to the fact that there is a God who loves us and who is not prepared to stand back and watch as we continue on the path of destruction. God opens up a different path for us: God presents us with a different way, a hope-filled: a way created out of love.

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This new way that God offers is open to everyone who believes in Jesus!

To believe in Jesus is not just to give mental assent to who Jesus is. To believe in Jesus is to believe in the things that Jesus stood for. It is to live out the things that Jesus represented. It is to choose the way of life that Jesus offers.

When we choose the way of love, we are choosing the path of eternal life; not just life that goes on and on, but life in connection with the source of love - love that

never ends. It is to choose a life that is lived in an intimate relationship with God. And that journey begins when we understand and accept that we are loved by God.

When we grasp that fact, we will no longer see ourselves as worthless sinners or miserable failures. We will no longer see ourselves as solely responsible for our fortunes in life. Those are heavy burdens that have crushed many souls. Instead, we will see ourselves as persons who are helped and supported through life because we are valued – valued not because of what we have or can accomplish, but because of who we are: people who are loved by God.

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God invites us to see ourselves as loved, and when we do, that can make all the difference!

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