

Light Up! **John 3:14-21**

John 3:16 is the most popular and beloved bible verse. “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.” Of course, how we understand or express this verse can be different. Let me show you a short video. [ppt] I don’t know if this is true or not, but you see the difference between the white church and black church, preaching on this verse. But at least, we all believe that “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.” This is the very unique and life-giving message of Christianity and is most notably different from Eastern religions.

In Eastern religions, it is human beings who reach to Heaven, Tao, or Nirvana. A person becomes Buddha or Gentleman by one’s own strengths and ceaseless efforts. But Christians believe that God first comes down to us, forgive us, lift us up and empowers us to reach to the kingdom of heaven. We are so used to this belief that we may feel nothing when we hear this gospel again. But for many, this claim that God comes down to help us is revolutionary.

Since you have a Korean pastor, you need to know about Korea so let me ask you some questions. Can you guess “Who Brought the Gospel to Korea?” A missionary? A merchant? An emissary? Who Brought the Gospel to Korea? The answer is a “Korean did!” The first protestant church in Korea was established in 1883 and the first western missionary arrived in Korea in 1884. There was a church before a missionary came to the Korean peninsula. Interesting. Isn’t it? Mr. Su-Jeong Lee was one of the first Protestants in Korea and he became a Christian while reading the Bible. When he was in Japan, he somehow acquired a Bible and started to read it on his own, and he was amazed by the story of salvation and became a Christian. He wrote in his confession of faith that as a Confucian, he tirelessly worked to be a Gentleman which is the ideal image of man in Confucianism. However, he realized that it was almost impossible to reach this ideal and he was disappointed. While reading the Bible, he was intrigued by this belief that God would come down to save us and help us to be in the kingdom of God. This was an enlightening and revolutionary revelation for him. So he decided to be baptized and he established the first Korean protestant church and sent letter to the United States to send missionaries to Korea. God loved the world so that God sent God’s only Son to save us! This is the gospel we believe. Amen?

Believing in the good news!

This is the incredibly good news we believe in. We can be saved when we believe in this good news of Jesus Christ in whom God’s love and power are fully revealed to us. But we must be careful not to confuse believing in the correct doctrines about God with trusting God. During our Tuesday Lenten book study, we talked about how simply knowing and intellectually assenting the right religious doctrines does not really save us. For instance, everyone knows how to live a healthy life. You should eat fresh vegetables and fruit rather than junk food. You should drink water rather than soft drinks. Instead of, watching TV or your smartphone on the couch, you should move your body for your health. We have knowledge of the things a healthy lifestyle entails. The problem is, we don’t live out this life-saving knowledge. This applies to our faith as well. Simply knowing the right doctrine about God does not save us. Even though you whole heartedly assent with the right doctrines about God and Jesus Christ, it does not save you. Just like when the word become flesh (John 1:1) and lived among us, our lives are saved when our

knowledge and belief about Jesus Christ become truth for us and are fully embodied in us as truth. In fact, salvation is not a reward we receive after we pass a bar examination for heaven. Rather, following the way of life Jesus taught and showed us is salvation. Of course, Jesus' way is narrow and even seems impossible to follow. Jesus said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And love your neighbors as yourselves. Can you do this? Yes. Jesus said, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." Can you do this? Maybe... but not easy. He also said, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Can you follow this word? It seems almost impossible to obey Jesus' teaching in reality. Can we follow the way of salvation Jesus taught us? What we need is faith, faith in God and what God can do. God makes many things possible that our human understanding might think impossible. We are not able to walk the narrow path of life but God can make the impossible possible.

You may know the twelve steps in addiction recovery of A. A. Dr. McFee wrote, "One of the most fundamental beliefs necessary to follow the twelve steps in addiction recovery is belief in a Higher Power — because in addiction we lose our sense that recovery and healing are possible. Belief is crucial for our survival in addiction." (Sermon Fodder) Without belief that God will help us overcome this addiction, there is no hope. This applies to us too. Many of us may struggle with small and large demons in our lives. Addictions, anxiety, trauma, bad habits, and so on. Bishop Tom Berlin describes them as spiritual black holes that have powerful gravity over our lives and make us unable to move on. As we all know, we cannot see a black hole because its gravity is so strong will not allow even light to escape. What we need is faith in a mighty God who so loved us that God sent God's only Son, Jesus Christ who is the true light of the world. The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrated the ability to pierce the darkness, lift the weight and bring new life. (The Third Day, 13) God has power to break all shackles that bind us and free us from the powerful gravity of sin. Do not be disappointed with your failures or how often you stumble. Believe in God's power and continue to walk on your faith journey. That's enough to light up your life even in the midst of darkness. Amen.