

Celebration of Heaven

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There's something woven into all of us that likes to celebrate. It's not something that comes just by coming to know Jesus, it's something that comes in our makeup from birth. It's innate. We're born with it, and it's global. There's something we love about celebrating, and we celebrate all kinds of things. I don't know if there's a way to put a dollar amount on what we do to celebrate things. It is so much a part of our world. We celebrate births, we celebrate engagements, we celebrate marriages, we celebrate anniversaries, we celebrate accomplishments, we celebrate wins, we celebrate championships. We celebrate victories at work. We celebrate making a sale, making a deal. We look for holidays to make up to celebrate. We celebrate when the first tooth comes in a child. And I guess we celebrate when we lose our last one. I mean, we celebrate lots of things. I think it's God's gift to us. It's God's gift to humanity in that he's given us a little taste of heaven because heaven is a place of celebration. You read the book of Revelation, the last book of God's word, and you find out that heaven will be a place of celebration. There is this build toward what Revelation speaks of as the wedding banquet. This coming together of the bride of Christ with the groom named Jesus. And there's singing and there's celebration, there's bright lights, there's celebration. And maybe what is in us from birth is just God's way of giving us a little addiction to Heaven.

I want to ask you to think with me a little bit about the celebration of Heaven. Last week we looked at what makes heaven celebrate, and we saw that heaven celebrates one sinner who repents more than 99 who need no repentance. I'm confident that in this room today, I would just think majority in this room, not all, but majority of this room, you know Jesus as Lord and savior. And God would be pleased with us gathering here. He'd be honored with our worship this morning. But don't miss the truth of scripture where Jesus himself taught that there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repents more than 99 who need no repentance.

And so today, if you're here and you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you know what would make heaven celebrate today more? It would be for you to give your life to Jesus Christ. If you would turn to Jesus and trust him alone as your Lord and Savior, Heaven would be cheering right now. Amen, church? Don't let this day go by without giving your life to Christ. You say, "I don't know it all. I don't know the whole picture. I don't know the whole story." If you know that you've sinned and you need a savior and you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sin, and you believe that he rose from the dead and lives today, you can be saved. You can turn to him and trust him alone for forgiveness of your sin and he will give you a new heart. He'll give you a new life. And there'll be a lot to learn beyond that. A lot of ways to serve him in the future, but with childlike faith, you can come to Jesus with trust and faith. Just like you sat down in that chair this morning in this room and trusted that chair to hold you up, today if you would sit down into the life and story of Jesus Christ, he will save you today.

A lot of you look at me and in your mind you would be saying, "I'm so thankful I've done that." "I'm so thankful I've been saved." And you're hoping even that somebody in this room that doesn't know Jesus would be saved right now. That they would give their life to Jesus Christ. I want to ask you a question. Those of you who know Jesus today in this room, I want to ask you this big question. Will you participate in helping heaven celebrate? Will you participate in helping heaven celebrate? I want to ask you three questions that go along with that one main question. And I want to invite you as a follower of Jesus Christ to get involved, to participate, to go after the one that needs Jesus Christ.

Look with me in God's word and we see a group of people that are being introduced to Jesus Christ. This gospel of John, after Jesus had died on the cross and rose again and ascended to heaven, John wrote these words to tell the story of Jesus. We pick up in John chapter one and we see the life of one named John the Baptist. Different than the writer of this book, and John the Baptist is telling about Jesus and what he came to do as John the Baptist. He says, "I'm the one that came to make a way for Jesus. I'm the announcer. I'm the one that walks into the ring and tells who's coming." You see this happening here in front of people that are around John and following John. Pick up in verse 29 as John is speaking, he says,

"The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him."

That's John the Baptist. He saw Jesus coming toward him physically, in body form, walking.

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" ³⁰This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³²And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Let me stop right here and give you the first question. Here's the first question. The main question is this, will you participate in causing heaven to celebrate? But here's a question that supports that. Let me ask you this question, who is "The One?" Who is "The One?" When you hear John the Baptist speaking, you see him operating, what you learn here is that according to John the Baptist, "The One" is Jesus Christ Himself. He's the one. In these verses that I've read, they identify who Jesus was. You began to hear these names of Jesus and in just a very short span of verses, you begin to have all of these describing names of who Jesus is. Already just in these four or five verses, John identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. John comes, he says, he sees him coming toward him and his words are, "Behold the lamb of God." There are seven or eight different ways, seven or eight different references to who Jesus is from verse 29 down to the end of the chapter. The first one is the lamb of God. Now, if you've never heard of Jesus before or you are not familiar with the Jewish culture, or you don't know the Old Testament, to say about someone they're the lamb of God, well what is the lamb? What's the big deal about that?

But in their day and in their culture and in this landscape for John to say, "This is the lamb of God", all of the old covenant, all of the Old Testament, all of Moses and what he did and the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt. All of the prophets, it comes together and what they knew of the temple and the tabernacle and the sacrifices and the festivals, because they knew that in their culture, the way they related to God was through a high priest. And that once a year, this high priest would go into the temple, into the Holy of Holies, and he would put a lamb on the altar and that lamb would be slaughtered there and that would serve for one year's remission of God's wrath on sin. And the next year would roll around and another high priest would go in and put a lamb on the altar, and the next year the high priest would go in and put a lamb on the altar, and over and over and over again, it's just trying to deal with the sin of the people.

Well, when Jesus comes, John says, behold the Lamb of God. And John was pointing out that just like the prophets had promised and predicted, just like the law pointed to, there has come, ultimately, one sinless, spotless lamb. As you read through the rest of the New Testament, you see that one would die once and for all for years in eternity to come, to pay for all of humanity's sin. And when we turn in faith to the Lamb of God and trust him, his righteousness, his payment for sin is credited to our account. John is promoting, he is announcing here that the Lamb has come, the Sacrifice, the once and for all sacrifice for sin has come. He's the One. He's not just another lamb. He's not just another sacrifice. He's not just a possible sacrifice. He's not one of many sacrifices. He is the once and for all Lamb of God that would die and pay for sin.

It goes on and he describes him not only as the Lamb of God but also as the son of God. And in verse 34 John says, "And I have seen and I have borne witness, that this is the son of God." Not one of many, but the Son of God. Later he would be described in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life." He was the son of God and this was evidenced by the descending of the Holy Spirit on Jesus Christ. John says, I witnessed this. I saw the spirit descend upon him. It was God's mark to identify publicly that this is not only the Lamb of God, but also the Son of God.

Continue to read down through these verses, we find out that Jesus is identified as the Messiah, the one, the anointed one. Throughout the Old Testament, there was the promise that the Messiah would come, the anointed one would come, the savior of the world would come, and John is saying here in these verses and other witnesses of Jesus that he's here. We waited hundreds of years. He's here in the flesh, the lamb of God, the son of God, the Messiah. He goes on and you see later in these verses, it speaks of the son of man, the King of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, all pointing to the one. Listen, when we talk about salvation, we talk about the forgiveness of sin. Jesus is not one of many ways to be saved. He's not one of many messiahs, not one of many sons, not one of many gods. Jesus Christ is the way of salvation. He's The One. The emphasis on the article is huge. And Jesus himself would say, I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life, and no man comes to the Father but through me. And I want to just say to you today that if you've never trusted The One, why not turn your life over to him today and be saved and be changed forever?

Second question, will you participate in causing heaven to celebrate? We need to make sure we know the answer to who is The One. Second question is, who is your one? Who is your one? Now you may immediately say, "Pastor, are you saying, is Jesus my one?" That that would be awesome if your answer to who is my one would be Jesus. Jesus is my one. He's my savior. But I'm not talking with this question about that answer. When I say who is your one, here's what I'm asking. I'm asking you, who is the one in your life that needs to know The One? Who is the one in your family that needs to know The One? Who is the one among your friends that needs to know The One? Who is your one? Who is that person that you work with, interact with or you're on the team with? You're in the work room with, you're at family reunions with, you live next door to, you fish with, you hunt with. You shop with, you go out to eat with. Who is your one?

We see in these verses, beginning in verse 35 that when people met Jesus, there was one person on their heart that they went to get to introduce them to Jesus that they had found. Look in verse 35 it says, "The next day again, John was standing with two of his disciples and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, 'Behold, the lamb of God.' The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them follow him and said to them, 'What are you seeking?' And they said to him, 'Rabbi,' which means teacher, 'Where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come and you will see.' So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day for it was about the 10th hour." So around four in the afternoon, one of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother, Simon and said to him, we have found the Messiah, which means Christ. He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter. So here's Andrew who's following John. He's introduced to Jesus. He goes and spends a day with Jesus, finds out that he's the Messiah, believes that he's the Messiah, and the Greek word for first is the word "proton", there's some debate on whether it's an adverb or an adjective, but it is descriptive of first things. The first thing that he did after learning and believing that Jesus was the Messiah, he went and found his brother.

It was the first thing he did. He went and found his family member that needed to meet Jesus. What you find about the story of Andrew throughout scripture, I believe he's mentioned three times in scripture, and all three times that Andrew's mentioned, he's always bringing someone to Jesus. Andrew here brings his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus. It was Andrew that found the little boy with the loaves of bread and the fish, and brought this little boy to Jesus for his food to be used. And then it was Andrew that was a part of the group that brought the Greeks to Jesus. He had met Jesus, and what he did was he went after people and brought them to Jesus. And I want to ask you, with the perspective that Andrew went and found his brother, is there a family member that you might say today is your One? A granddaddy that needs Jesus, an uncle, a first cousin, a brother, a mother, a son, a grandchild. And you know today their name, it's right there. They need Jesus. You say, "Pastor, I'll go to Mississippi before I talked to my family about Jesus. I mean, God send me anywhere. Just don't send me to talk to my family about Jesus." It's hard, isn't it? A lot of people say the hardest person in their life to talk to is a family member. And probably some of you've got some scars from being at family reunions and there's an uncle or an aunt that has Jesus back there somewhere and every time y'all get together, you know where it's headed and a lot of people are upset about it.

You love your granddaddy, you love your brother, you love your grandchild, and you love Jesus. Don't wait on somebody that doesn't love that person like you love them to go tell them about Jesus. Ask the spirit of God to give you courage and the opportunity and the words and the burden to see your family member come to know Jesus. Make it your first priority leaving this room today to pray for that family member and to find the opportunities to speak to that family member, to introduce them to Jesus.

I notice also there's a guy named Phillip here. In verse 43 it says,

"The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathaniel and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' And Nathaniel said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Phillip said to him, 'Come and see.' And Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and to him, 'Behold an Israelite, indeed in whom there is no deceit.' And Nathaniel said to him, 'How do you know me?' And Jesus answered him, 'Before Phillip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.' And Nathaniel answered him, 'Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the King of Israel.' Jesus answered him, 'Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You'll see greater things than these?' And he said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you'll see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man.'"

So maybe a family member that God would use you to reach, but also you may be like Philip today and there's a friend that God would use you to reach. A friend you hunt with, a friend that you fish with, a friend that you shot with. A sorority sister that you had 20 years ago that you haven't talked to in a long time or that you reach out to once a year. Maybe it's somebody you've lived next door to, or an old sand pile, Tonka Truck buddy that you had years ago as a little kid. Just friends. And Philip, he meets Jesus and he goes to Nathaniel and he says, we found him of who Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote. Jesus of Nazareth. When Phillips said, "Of whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote", Philip was saying, to Nathaniel, everything that we know the law, about the old covenant, about the Old Testament, the one that the prophets were talking about, I met him. He's here. Now if this encounter had happened many years later, we wrote something like this, we would be able to say, "We found the one of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, who also died on a cross, who also was buried in a borrowed tomb, who also rose again on the third day, who also appeared before hundreds of people, who also ascended to heaven, who also is coming back again one day." We live from a perspective of seeing a lot more of the story, but for Philip and Nathaniel, for them to see the one that fulfilled all that Moses had said in the law, all that the Old Testament had pointed to, he was able to say, "We found him. Come on." It was his friend. And who is your friend that needs Jesus.

Last question. Early this morning I was looking back over the message and praying and thinking. This was not in the message until early this morning, and it's this last question that God just pierced my heart with and it was this: Who is God's one? Who is God's one? Who is The One? Jesus Christ. Who is your one? Maybe it's a family member or a friend. I'm going to ask this question, who is God's one? What does that mean? What that means is, who is the one that God is already going after? It's here with Phillip and Nathaniel. "Nathaniel said to him, 'Can

anything good come out of Nazareth?' Phillip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and of him," And he speaks to him. Then Nathaniel says, how do you know me? And listen to Jesus' answer. "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

Do you know what's going to happen? Some of you are going to pick up the phone and you're going to call your friend or you're going to call your family member and somebody's going to say to you, "I can't believe you called today." "I cannot believe you called today. I was just thinking yesterday, if there was somebody would," and they would fill in the blank. And really what they're saying without knowing they're saying it, they're saying, "before you ever called, Jesus saw me under the fig tree." They're saying, God's already been working in my heart. And today when your heart races and beats fast and you think about, I don't know if I can ever do it. I don't know if I can say anything to my friend. I don't know if I can say anything to my family member. I don't even know how to pray for them. I've about given up hope. Listen, hear me, hear me. It's not all on you. And the very fact that God would lay a name on your heart could be the very evidence that God's already at work and let that give you great confidence that he's put a name on your heart because it's likely, before you ever called them, Jesus has already been working in their life.

I don't know what your theological position is about soul winning. I know this, that when somebody comes to know Jesus here on this earth, it's exciting. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said years ago, he says, "To be a soul winner is the happiest thing in the world and with every soul you bring to Jesus Christ, you seem to get a new heaven here upon earth." I don't know, you might be in a Calvinist camp. You might be in a non Calvinist camp. You have these theological positions about evangelism and discipleship, and listen, here's what I want to say to you. If you've got all the answers, hallelujah. Write a book. But hear me. Don't let your theological positions or your theological questions stand in the way of your biblical obedience. There is no merit in saying to God, I'm a Calvinist. I'm an Armenian. I'm a non-Calvinist. I'm a freewill. I'm a whatever. There is merit in saying before God, I am a fisher of men. I am an ambassador of Christ. I am a witness. I believe that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Don't let your theological position and questions stand in the way of your biblical obedience.

Today when you leave, I'm inviting you to take a tangible reminder of what God is saying to your heart today about your one. When you go out of this room, you're going to find at each one of the exits some buckets there that have a piece of plastic in them that are shaped like this number one, it's a key chain. And I want to ask you if God's put a name on your heart, you've given a big yes to Jesus that I want to participate in helping heaven celebrate. I want to ask you to take one of these key chains with you, and I want to ask you to do these things. I want to ask you to identify your one and every time you look at that one that you'd be reminded of that name. Some of you may do this and I plan to do this. It may be some reason that this would create some awkwardness that you don't want to deal with, but I'm going to take a Sharpie and I'm going to write the three letters of the man's name on my one that I'm going to be praying for. And that's the second thing. Identify one and then just to begin to pray daily for that one, and then third, ask the Lord to give you opportunities to have spiritual conversations with that one. Pray for that. Pastor, I don't know how to get started. I don't know how to talk to family. Can I give you just two or three suggestions? Talking to a family member, talking to a neighbor,

somebody you're going to see every single day or somebody you know, it's not just a one conversation deal. There's a lot going on here. Here's a way you can start the conversation.

"Hey dad. I need to talk to you about something that's really important in my heart and my life, and I just want to say up front that I'm not counting on this conversation to change our relationship. And when I share with you what's on my heart, I hope we can just keep right on going. This isn't going to change our relationship. You say yes, no or whatever. It's not going to change our relationship."

Or, you may be in a situation where this would be helpful.

"Hey neighbor, I know we see each other every day at the mailbox. I know we see each other every day in the lounge. We've worked together for 20 years and I hope we get to work together for 20 more. There's something heavy on my heart that I got to share with you, and I just want you to know moving ahead, that every time we see each other this isn't going to be the only thing that we talk about. And there'll be a lot of conversations ahead where I'd never bring this up again, but I just got to talk to you right now about something that's heavy on my heart. It doesn't have to be what dominates our conversation from now on, and I just want you to know that."

A couple of those things can help us kind of take the awkwardness out of the future conversations that we would have with someone. So how do I get the conversation started? Maybe something like this, maybe saying, "Hey, tell me about your spiritual life? Do you ever think about spiritual things?"

You get an answer, "No." Awesome. I'm going to kill my pastor when I see him next time.

Maybe they say, "Yes, I do. I do think about spiritual things." "That's amazing. What do you think about it?" "I think there's a lot of ways to get to heaven." "Really? Tell me about that." At some point, can I tell you how my life has changed? Sometimes it's hard to talk to family or coworkers or friends or roommates or teammates because they've seen us at our worst, and we think to ourselves, how can I bring up Jesus? And there've been a few times where I was not Jesus. Maybe you could start the conversation like this.

"Hey Jim, I know I'm not perfect, and you know I'm not perfect, and I've blown it around here a lot of times. But I know someone who's perfect and he's changed my life, and he's changing my life. It's so important to me, I can't let another day go by without just talking to you about Jesus and what he's doing in my life and what I think what he could do in your life." Just right up front, you're leveling the ground. You're saying I am a sinner and I need a savior, and I met him. I want you to know him.

Who's your one that you could start praying for every day. That you could start looking for opportunities for conversation. I'd encourage you to invite them to come to church with you. Say, "Would you like to go and sit with me in church? We've got some new space. I want you to meet my Pastor." And that'd be another thing, if you bring a friend with you that you've been praying for, it would be a joy for me, for you to walk up to me and say, "Hey, I want you to

meet my friend." You don't have to walk up and say, "Hey pastor, I want you to meet my one. They're right here." You may know him well enough that you 'd want to do that. But you can just say, "Hey, I want you to meet my friend." We're 77 days from Easter. What if the next 77 days we just had a name we were praying for every day. We were looking for opportunities to talk to them about Jesus. If you see my key chain in the days ahead, you're going to see this one hanging on it with a name that I'm praying for. Looking forward to heaven, celebrating when they come to know Christ.

I want to ask you to stand your feet and bow your head and I'll ask our band to come. Some of you, today, you can't leave this room without praying for your one. It's so heavy on your heart, you know today that you're not going to walk out of here without praying for them. And I invite you to come from the stadium seating or from the floor here, come to these steps and let's pray together. And let's take their name before the Lord and let it start today. Some of you need to trust Jesus is Lord and Savior. I'm going to be right here. I want you to come and share that with me. Some you've already done that, but you've never followed the Lord in Believer's baptism. Would you come and share that with me and we'll talk about scheduling that for another day, but it'd be just a chance to get it out there and let's talk about it. Some of you need to just have somebody pray with you for someone else or for you. I'll be here at the front as well. You come right now. We're going to sing the truth of who Jesus is and declare it. You come right now as the Lord leads. In Jesus' name.