

Final Beverly Hills Sermon

1 John 3:19-4:6

Preached at 8.15, C@10 and C@5 on 28th May 2017

Intro

What do I say to you in this final sermon to you as your rector?

I went back and looked up my first sermon to you on 3rd December 2010.

It was from Matthew 7:7-12 — from Jesus' famous sermon on the mount. The big point I made in the sermon was about our greatest need.

I'm glad to say that I made the point that Jesus himself is our greatest need.

And what I want to leave you with today is precisely the same point.

Nothing in my thinking has changed in the last 6 ½ years about the greatest need of this church and of every member of it.

And I hope what I've taught you and hopefully modelled over my time here is that Jesus is all we need.

I want to spend a bit of time in this week's passage from 1 John but I might get a little bit more general in places today — I hope that's okay!

Trust and Obey

As we know, John's addressing us as people who know Jesus.

In 3:23 John reminds us of the command of God to believe in Jesus, and to love one another.

The two can't be separated — they go together.

As I leave Beverly Hills I'm so thankful to be able to see evidence of obedience to God's command everywhere.

I'm leaving behind a church full of people who believe in Jesus, God's only Son, the only Lord and Saviour worth believing in, in a world full of 'saviours' and 'lords' that offer all kinds of things they can't deliver.

Never lose sight of the importance of faith in him, brothers and sisters.

When you say he is Lord, be confident that he's in control of your life, and that he's in control of this church.

Jesus knows what's best.

He doesn't always give us what we think we need.

But look at what he does give us and be thankful.

This church isn't what I envisaged it would be by now back in 2010.

It's something much better...

...it's the church God has determined it should be and that Jesus has made it to be, as he's been working in our lives through his word and by his Spirit.

Praise God!

Some of you might look back and long for the days gone by... don't!

Some of you might be frustrated that the church isn't everything you think it could be... don't!

This church right now is the way God has determined it to be as we seek together to live by faith in Jesus, which means trusting that he's the Lord in control of it now.

As we've been seeking to live in obedience to God's command to believe in Jesus, the results have become clearer and clearer to me over my time here.

I'm seeing people genuinely loving one another.

That's the Word of God doing its work in you.

And he will bring blessing from that — and blessing is what God has promised to do through Jesus.

Sue and I have been blessed by the love many of you have shown us during our time here.

For those of you who've come from difficult church situations I'm so thankful that God has provided this church as a loving, welcoming place for you to call home.

And that's what makes a home — love!

I hope as I step down that church feels more and more like home to you as you all grow in your love for one another.

I've never felt like a 'boss' or 'strategic leader' or worse a 'CEO' of the church, but more like a father of a family of God's people — because that's what we are.

I have tried to love this church in that way.

And like any father I've failed sometimes.

But despite that God has continued to grow this church in love for Jesus and for one another.

Keep obeying God's command — believe in Jesus and love one another.

Love each other as he's loved us.

Don't be harsh, abrupt and demanding with one another.

And forgive each other whatever wrongs and failures you've suffered.

Believe

I'm rambling a bit so there's a bit of crossover of points today.

We saw at the beginning of this series how important it is that we don't wander away from the historical apostolic teaching about Jesus.

People in John's day had done that and were teaching a 'higher level' of understanding about Jesus and the Christian life.

Here in chapter 4 he's talking about testing the spirits when we listen to people speak about Jesus and how to live for him.

Don't accept what anyone says if it's out of step with the word of God in Scripture.

And there's only one way you'll be able to do that — and that's to be reading and studying your Bible for yourself.

The National Church Life Survey that you completed at the end of last year has just produced the initial summary results..

... it showed that 60% of the people in this church read their Bible every day or most days.

When I first came here that number was 51% — just over half.

And I praise God for that change!

22% of you read the Bible a few times a week, 3% once a week and 14% occasionally or hardly ever.

Friends let me exhort you as I leave to press on in daily Bible reading.

A thousand voices speak into your life every day — from your own mind to the people you live and work and study with, to the ads and programs on TV and everywhere else.

We need to hear God speaking above all those voices.

The Bible is the means he's graciously given us to hear his voice.

We don't learn what he wants us to know by osmosis.

We grow in godly wisdom as we listen to the words he speaks to us in Scripture.

And while good preaching and teaching at church are his good provision, they are not enough.

To be able to test the spirits as John's talking about doing here, we need to know our Bibles.

The danger of not knowing our Bible is that a convincing, impressive teacher may lead you to believe in things about Jesus — about what he thought, said and did — that aren't at all what God means.

But on the positive side, reading the Bible is the God given means he gives us to come close to him.

If you're looking for a deeper experience of the Christian life through church or anything else, but not reading your Bible, you're grasping at straws while rejecting the branch that God's given you.

Don't pass up the wonderful gift he's given us.

The Bible isn't a book to read and put on the shelf and say 'done that'.

Every day's reading is a personal time together with God.

There are lots of helps for reading the Bible, like the New Bible Commentary that covers all the books of the Bible in one volume. Or you can buy individual commentaries and books.

But get everything God has to offer out of this precious gift.

The more you read the more he'll grow you in faith, obedience and love.

Look Outward

Let me encourage you to keep looking outward.

In 4:6 John says that whoever knows God listens to us.

He didn't say 'listened' (past tense).

There's an ongoing process happening when the apostolic teaching of the Bible is spoken.

Whoever knows God listens to it.

You listened to it.

God will bring others to know him as they listen as we speak its message.

Others won't listen — as John says in v5 — they'll listen to the wisdom of the world.

We don't know who is who.

Jesus just commands us to make disciples of all the peoples of the earth by teaching them everything that's been taught to us about him.

That means sharing what we know with the people God gives us opportunities with.

It might be the members of your family or someone you sit down next to on a train.

It's the way God has put in place to bring people from death to life in his eternal kingdom and family.

As they hear the gospel from us, some of them will listen and respond in repentance and faith.

Others will not listen to us because they prefer to listen to people who speak from the viewpoint of the world, because – like the people they listen to – they are of the world.

Don't let the potential for rejection put you off from taking the opportunities God gives you.

We'll all have opportunities. Use them wisely... but use them.

Leave their response to God.

If he's determined they'll listen, they'll listen.

He is Lord.

If they reject you, He is still Lord. You haven't failed.

And remember you're not a one man show – you are part of something much greater – the church.

The ignorant teenager who rejects your words about Jesus today may be the 29 year old new Dad in a few years time who God has now prepared to listen.

Don't fear the response!

Be prayerful and confident in God as you evangelise the people he gives you opportunity with.

Pray that Christ will grow his church here and everywhere as we and Christians everywhere tell the people in our lives about Jesus.

Welcome everyone who Jesus brings into this church and help them to come to know him.

Pray

Finally, pray! And don't cease praying.

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NIV11)

In some older translations it says 'pray without ceasing'.

Pray without giving up.

Be people who continually pray.

Like being in the habit of reading your Bible every day, be in the habit of praying every day.

Pray for yourself.

Pray for God to make himself known more and more to you as you read his Word... pray that he'll give you wisdom to fear him and live for him (as James says we should do in James 1:5)... pray that he'll give you strength to go against the tide and live for him in a world that hates him...

Tell him in prayer how you feel when you're hurting and discouraged... as Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:7

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7 NIV11)

Ask him to save your loved ones.

Parents, pray for each of your children every day!

Pray for each other.

Pray for the church.

Pray about everything!

There is nothing that you speak to God in prayer that he would ask you why you're bringing this to him.

And he will answer... maybe not immediately and maybe not in the way you might like or hope... but always for the ultimate good of all who love him, and always for the glory of Jesus...

...and His glory is our greatest good.

Final Words

Now my final words to you.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus – as the writer to the Hebrews says to us.

Look back to the cross where he died for you to make you God's child, and look forward to heaven where he waits to welcome you.

I feel a bit like Paul in Acts 20 saying his farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus.

I hope there are some similarities.

“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.” (Acts 20:20–21 NIV11)

...

“(For) I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.” (Acts 20:27 NIV11)

As he left them he said:

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32 NIV11)

And so I commit you, my dear brothers and sisters to God, and to the word of his grace in the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ.

As Paul wrote to the Philippians I exhort you:

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” (Philippians 1:27 NIV11)

Live your lives every day as if the gospel makes a difference.

And as he finished his words to the Ephesian elders Paul knelt with them to pray... and I'd like to lead you in prayer now this last time...

- Thanks for grace, mercy and love in Jesus
- Thanks for this church and our time together
- I thank you for all of the brothers and sisters you have given to Sue and me here at Beverly Hills and for the loving relationships we have here
- Thanks that this church is strong, built on the solid foundation of the gospel
- I pray for this church now as I leave...
- Continue to grow your people here in their knowledge and love for Jesus
- Bless each one with a growing desire, thirst and hunger for you
- Help them to love each other deeply from the heart as you command us to do
- Send them out daily to proclaim the good news of Jesus to their families, neighbour and friends, and to the people of Beverly Hills and Kingsgrove
- Sustain each one through your word and by your Spirit to persevere in running the race to the very end, throwing off everything that hinders and fixing their eyes on Jesus
- Sustain this church through the days ahead without a rector, and please bring a new man to lead this church soon.
- And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.
- Amen