

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, October 24, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Series: Portraits of Jesus

Jesus: A Portrait of the Father - John 14:1-9; Hebrews 1:3

Introduction: Clarence Hall was a war correspondent on Okinawa in 1945. He wrote about the most unusual “*invasion*” that occurred as the American forces swept that island. As an advance patrol came upon an obscure village of about 1,000 people called Shimabuku, they were greeted by two natives. The two men were smiling and bowing and talking up a storm.

The leader of the patrol was wary of tricks, so he summoned for an interpreter. The interpreter listened to the two men, and said, “*The older man’s name is Mojun Nakamura and he’s the mayor of the village, the other is his brother, Shosei Kina and he’s the schoolmaster. That’s a Bible the older one has in his hand. It seems we’re being welcomed as ‘fellow Christians.’*”

Guided by the two old men, the patrol cautiously toured the compound. They had seen other Okinawan villages which mostly consisted of unbelievable poverty, ignorance, and filth. In comparison to these, Shimabuku shone like a diamond in a dung heap. Proudly the two old men showed them their spotless homes, their terraced fields, fertile and neat, their storehouses and their prized sugar mill. And everywhere they went, they were greeted by smiles and dignified bows.

The old men talked on, and the interpreter said, “*They’ve met only one American before, long ago. Because he was a Christian they assume we are, too—though they can’t quite understand why we came in shooting.*”

But after talking and listening to the men for a while, their incredible story came out. They said that thirty years before, an American missionary on his way to Japan had come to Shimabuku. He’d stayed only long enough to make a pair of converts (these same two men), teach them a couple of hymns, leave them a Japanese translation of the Bible and exhort them to live by it. They’d had no contact with any Christian since. Yet during those 30 years; guided only by the Bible, the two converts had found not only an inspiring person on whom to pattern a life, but sound precepts on which to base their society. They’d adopted the Ten Commandments as their legal code and the precepts of the Bible as law; the Sermon on the Mount as their social conduct guide. And in the school, the Bible was read daily by all students and memorized.

The result was plain to see. Shimabuku for years had had no jail, no brothel, no drunkenness, no divorce; there was a high level of health and happiness.

Well, Hall wrote that the troops moved on to other battles, but a few days later, during a lull, he and an interpreter and went back to Shimabuku. Where they strolled through the quiet village streets, and tried to soak up the calm.

He wrote that he then heard the sound of singing. He followed it and came to Nakamura’s house, where a worship service was under way. Having no knowledge of churchly forms or ritual, the Shimabukans had developed their own. There was much Bible reading by Kina, and repetition by the worshipers. Then came hymn singing. The tunes of the two hymns the missionary had taught—“Fairest Lord Jesus” and “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” were sung.

He wrote that after many spontaneous prayers, there was a discussion of community problems. With each question, Kina would turn to some Bible passage to find the answer. And although the book’s cover was cracked and worn, and its pages were stained from 30 years’ constant use, Kina held it with the utmost reverence and care.

When the service was over, Hall wrote that his interpreter said, “*So this is what comes out of only a Bible and a couple of old guys who wanted to live like Jesus! Maybe we’re using the wrong kind of weapons.*”

Time had dimmed the Shimabukans’ memory of the missionary; neither Kina nor Nakamura could recall his name. They did remember his parting statement. As expressed by Nakamura, it was: “*Study this Book well. It will give you strong faith. And when faith is strong, everything is strong.*”

We’ve been looking in John’s gospel at his portraits of Jesus. John has shown us an array of portraits that reveal Jesus’ character and nature. We’ve seen Jesus’ divinity as the Word of God; His humanity as the Son of Man, His spiritual insight as the Teacher, His power as the Life-Changer and the Healer and the Resurrection

and the Life; His provision as the Bread of Life and the Light of the World, and His compassion as the Sinner's best friend. This morning, we come to Chapter 14 where we find Jesus portraying Himself as all the above as the Father.

As Chapter 14 opens, we find Jesus comforting His disciples. He has just shared His last supper with them, and told them of his impending betrayal and death. He has just told Simon Peter that even he would deny Him three times before the night was over. They are very upset, sad, and confused. No doubt, this disturbing news has caused them to question Jesus and their relationship with Him, so Jesus pauses to reach out to them with words of comfort and truth. He said:

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?"

*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **John 14:1-9 (NIV)***

I don't know what you're going through or have been through recently, but I know that sometimes life can come at us so hard and relentlessly; we're left dazed and confused like these disciples were. By contrast, I know that even when life is going along well, it can still affect our relationship with God because we can tend to leave Him out of our lives.

I say this because we need to know that our relationship with God is pivotal in our lives. Our relationship with God determines our values. It determines our attitude toward our responsibility - towards our homes and families; towards our co-workers and classmates; and towards society as a whole. What we believe, or fail to believe about God is the critical issue of life.

One thing is for sure, we can't ever say that we don't know God because God has not revealed Himself to us. In our text, Jesus Himself said, *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* (9). Also, the writer of Hebrews says this about Jesus: *"The Son (that's Jesus) is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being...."* **Hebrews 1:3 (NIV)**

So, if you want to explain who God is - what He is like and what He is doing, all you have to do is look at Jesus, because in Him you have a picture of God. When you have seen Jesus, you have indeed seen the Father.

In fact, the revelation of God through Jesus Christ can be pretty well summed up in three simple statements that I want to share with you this morning:

1. God's Love Will Never Let You Down!

This truth is seen throughout the ministry of Christ. When people came to Jesus with questions, He always had answers. When they came to Him with problems, He always had solutions. I cannot think of one time in all of the Gospels when Jesus said to someone who came to Him with a real need, *"I'm sorry, I can't help you with that. You'll have to fend for yourself."*

It didn't matter if people were caught up in immorality, or if they were searching for theological answers. It didn't matter if people were sick or what their problem or burden was. When they came to Jesus, He never let them down, but always lifted them up. So, through Jesus, the first thing we learn about God is that He will never let us down!

Now, sometimes it seems that He does. We pray for God to take away our aches and pains and solve our problems, and sometimes it seems that nothing happens. So, we assume that God is far from us and doesn't even hear our prayers.

But the problem is not that God is letting us down. The problem is with our point of view. We get this way when we start thinking that we're the center of the universe - that everything revolves around what we want. We

think that if God is taking care of my health and my family and my financial needs - if God is taking care of all my problems - then God is lifting me up.

But if God doesn't take care of my little circle - then God is letting me down. But what we have to realize is that we are not the center - but rather God's plan is the center. Everything revolves around that.

And as things revolve around the center of God's Plan, we have to realize that we're not going to get everything we want, or think that we ought to have - even when we've prayed about it.

We also have to understand that just because bad things happen to us or things don't go our way, or it seems like we can't catch a break, that doesn't mean that God has let us down. The overriding thing that governs everything in the world is still the will and plan of God, and it is being carried out.

That's why Paul tells us in **Romans 8:28 (NIV)**, "*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him...*" Paul is not saying that all things are going to be good - God never promised that. God never promised us that He would save us from trouble. He did promise that He would save us in the midst of trouble - but He never promised to save us from trouble.

Look at what the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 23:5: "*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*" Have you ever thought about what that means? It doesn't say that God will take away your enemies, or guarantee victory over your enemies. It says that even in the midst of life's struggles, and pains, and worries, and even with all those burdens that are too heavy to carry, God always prepares a place where His people can come and find strength to carry on.

Many of you have faced the tragedy of losing loved ones. Many of you have faced the heartache of divorce or the heartbreak of rebellious kids, or the helplessness of losing your income or your health. Where do you find the strength and courage to go on? You find it at the Lord's table! That is where you come to know that through all those tears, and trials and tribulations - God will never let you down!

No matter how heavy your burdens are – No matter how great your worries or problems - God will never let you down! Secondly, through Jesus we also learn that:

2. God's Love Will Never Let You Off!

Sometimes, in our effort to bask in the fact that we serve a God who will never let us down, we might tend to forget that we also serve a God who will never let us off the hook. Because God is Holy - because God is righteous, because God is love - God must punish sin. And, as surely as God is love - God is also just.

Jonathan Edwards, one of the great preachers of yesteryear used to preach a sermon entitled, "Sinners in The Hands of an Angry God." In that sermon, He would portray sinners dangling over the pits of hell in the grasp of an angry God. He preached it so effectively that women fainted in the aisles and men clung to pews to try to hang on - because he told them of the awful coming doom and wrath of God.

You don't hear much of that kind of preaching anymore and when you do, it almost sounds as if the preacher is happy about it! So maybe we've gotten away from that, because it's wrong to paint a picture of God's wrath only. But I wonder if we've gone too far in the other direction. Maybe everybody thinks that God will just forgive us - because it is God's nature to forgive.

Maybe people have been left with the idea that it doesn't matter how we live - it doesn't matter how many times we have sinned - God is a God of love, so He will always pat us on the head like a doting grandfather and say, "*It's all right sonny. I understand, just do better and everything will be fine.*"

If that's what we have done, we've made a tragic mistake. In trying to emphasize God's love, I'm afraid that we've de-emphasized God's discipline. Because God is our Father, and because He loves us, He will discipline us when we fall short of what He expects. Because God is holy and hates sin - any sin that is unrepented of and unredeemed will be punished.

Someone needs to speak that message. God's love will never let you off! Finally, through Jesus we learn that:

3. God's Love Will Never End!

The first point is a message of comfort – “God's Love Will Never Let You Down.” The second point is a message of warning – “God's Love Will Never Let You Off.” This third point is a message of reassurance: “God's Love Will Never End.” This truth tells us that no matter how deep we may sink, or how far we may wander - God's love is still there for us.

The true test of love is that it will still be there even when it's not returned. And that is the amazing quality of God's love – it is always there.

You see that illustrated in the life of Jesus. He kept on loving people even when they rejected Him. He kept on loving people even when they spat on Him and laughed at Him and mocked Him and nailed Him to a cross. He kept on loving.

Even though Jesus' own people returned hatred for His love - He never withdrew His love for them. In fact, He prayed for their forgiveness. And that shows us God's love. It doesn't make any difference how far we wander - how deep our sin - how great our trials and tribulations – God's love will never end.

When Jesus was asked why He spent so much time with sinners, He told three stories that are recorded in Luke 15.

Jesus told about a woman who had lost a coin. Jesus said that God is like the woman who searches for the lost coin until she finds it.

Jesus told about the good shepherd who counted his sheep and found one was missing. He said that God was like that shepherd who went out into the night until he found the lost sheep and brought it home again.

Jesus said that His Father was like that father waiting for his prodigal son to come home - looking out the window - watching down the long road. He said when that father saw his son way down the road, he ran to greet him. He said that His father was like that because God will never, ever withdraw His love!

In God's providence and free will, He gives us the freedom to walk away - to go into the far country stay there forever if we want to. He gives us the freedom to laugh at Him and reject Him if we want to. But God's love for us will never end.

Conclusion: How do I know all this about God's love is true? I know because **John 3:16 (NIV)** says, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* God loved me so much, He was willing to part with His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, who came to this earth to live and die for my sins and the sins of the whole world. I can't think of any better demonstration of God's love for me.

And I can think of no better way to tell you of God and how to have a strong relationship with Him than to tell you that God's love will never let you down. God's love will never let you off. And God's love will never end.