

## Heaven's "Whoever Policy"-We Believe- John 3:16, Matthew 20:1-16

There is an ancient Egyptian obelisk which looks like a small Washington Monument that is 3,500 years old that was brought from Alexandria Egypt and erected in London in 1877. There is also one erected in New York and In Paris. It is called Cleopatra's Needle. At the base of this statue in London was placed a time capsule to be opened sometime in the future. In this time capsule was a set of coins of the day, children's toys, a city directory, photographs of the 12 most beautiful women of the day, a box of cigars, a razor, and in 215 languages the verse from John 3:16.

We have been looking at over the past few weeks at John 3:16. This is a verse was given to the religious leader Nicodemus when he came at night to have a conversation with Jesus about faith. From this verse we have discovered four things: God loves, God gives, we believe, we live. Have looked at God loves and God gives so this morning I want us to look at We believe. "...whosoever believes in him shall not perish..." The word whoever unfurls John 3:16 as a banner for the ages. The word whoever unrolls the welcome mat of heaven to humanity. The word whoever invites the world to God. Jesus just as easily could have narrowed the scope changing whoever into whatever. Jesus could have said, "Whatever you believe will make a difference whether or not you are welcomed into the kingdom." Instead Jesus used the word whoever. It is very indefinite.

All through the New Testament Jesus uses the word whoever in his teaching. Let me give you a few examples. "Whoever acknowledges me before people, I will acknowledge them before my Father in heaven." Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." "Whoever is thirsty, let them come..." These verses are full of the grace of God. Whoever means anyone. It also means everyone is eligible. It is not exclusive. It is very inclusive. No one is turned away who responds. God still wants us no matter what. It reminds me of two vivid stories one of which was read a moment ago.

The kingdom of God is like a guy who owned a large vineyard. His business was so big that he needed to hire a lot of workers. Just as some farmers hires migrant workers for the day or a landscaper hires some temps, this man needed

workers. A few were hired early in the morning. Others were hired at 9AM. The landowner recruited a few more at noon. He hired some more at 3PM and then at 5PM, one hour before quitting time, he picked up even more workers. At the end of the day the workers gathered to be paid. Those last men were surely surprised. One hour left in the workday and they expected to go home with next to nothing in their pockets. They were shocked when the owner paid them the same as he had paid those who had worked all day. No one pays a day's wage to a one-hour worker.

Of course you know what comes next. Those who got paid for the whole day complained about those who got the same as they got for only working one hour. How many times have we said or heard someone say in life, "It's not fair". But the owner said it was not because those who came early in the morning were paid what they agreed to by the owner. Jesus punch line in the story was, "They got the same, each of them a denarii." Is it not wonderful that God is not fair? We all want fairness in our dealings and most of the time this is important and is true. But in the case of our salvation and where we are going to spend forever it is a blessing that God is not fair because if he was none of us would pass to get in.

God's grace is the theme of this story. Whoever believes! Whoever accepts Jesus into their lives, no matter when it takes place, no matter where it takes place, will not perish. They will not be separated from God forever.

There is one other story I want to remind you of and that is the story of the son who spurned his father's kindness, demanded his inheritance then and there, and journeyed to a far country and wasted all of his inheritance. He rides the magic carpet of cash from one party to the next. One day his wallet grows thin. The credit card comes back. The waiter says no. The hotel maître d' says no. The boys says "uh-oh". He has to go to work now that he is broke. He finds employment feeding swine. This is not good for a Jewish boy.

Rather than swallowing the pig pods because he is hungry, he swallows his pride and heads home. He rehearses his repentance speech. It turns out he doesn't need it. His father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." The father was saving the son's place in the family. The

father treated him as if he had never left home. The father celebrated his coming home by restoring him by the symbol of the ring, the robe, the sandals, and the fatted calf.

The core of this story is this: If the father welcomed back and restored this son who had wasted his life and wasted his inheritance, and saved his place in the family, how much more will God do the same thing. God is saving us too. If heaven's banquet has name plates, one bears our names. We lose a lot in life. We lose sobriety, solvency, and sanity. We lose jobs and chances, and we lose at love. We lose youth and its vigor, its idealism, and its dreams. We lose much but we never lose our place on God's whoever list. Whoever is God's wonderful word of welcome.

Jesus' invitation seems too simple. We want to gravitate to other verbs. Work has a better ring to it. "Whoever works for God will be saved, or whoever satisfies God will be saved and not perish. But believe shouldn't I do more?"

A friend of mine many years ago was vacationing in Colorado and his family talked him into rappelling. As he got to front to get ready he was greeted by a bubbly college aged girl who asked him, "Have you ever done this before?" He said no, and she said all you have to do is trust me. The platform team assured him of a safe landing. He was given a leather harness and told to step in it. It's like a diaper and my friend thought he may need a diaper. It's simple they told him. Hold the rope and jump. Bounce off the wall with your feet. He asked how did he stop from crashing? The college age girl told him you don't She did that. You he asked, Yes, I hold the rope. Little comfort because she was half his age and half his size. He then asked, but don't I do something?" Again she said all he had to do was to trust her. He inched up to the side of the cliff and looked down. She then asked him if he had any valuables to which he answered only his life. A picture of his family and his out-date-will flashed before his eyes. . Come on. It's your turn she announced. As he looked at the young girl one more time he again said to himself, Can I really trust her? She did her work. He trusted and he landed safely.

Salvation is really simple. God works and we trust. "...whosoever believes in him, trusts him, will not perish." Like the young woman who told my friend, "Your part is to trust. Trust me to do what you can't". God says the same thing to us.

Do you know Jesus? Do you believe in him? Do you know where you are going spiritually? Are you heaven bound? Do accept God's love and God's gift?