

JESUS GAVE HEAVEN'S HEADLINES

John 3:16 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Few newspapers, written or digital, are read from cover to cover. Nevertheless, we all have patterns of reading the paper, some of us glancing at the front-page headlines, glancing at scores in sports, looking over the obituaries, and reading our favorite comics. In all of our being, most of us all long to find something in the paper to make us smile or laugh, but most often, the headlines rather, are grim, sad, terrible, terrifying, and even unbelievably crushing. On January 24th, Tuesday, I read two papers, first the Rawlins Times and the Wyoming Tribune Eagle. The headlines read “**Crash kills 5 on I-80 east of Rawlins.**” I wept inside as I read. This past Thursday, I read a February 1st headline written by Greg Johnson from the Cowboy State Daily in Lander entitled, “**Trooper Describes Fiery, Chaotic Scene On Night of Multi-Car Crash That Killed Five Students.**” Here are the abbreviated facts. Late two weeks ago today, January 22nd, a 57-year-old Tennessee roofer was driving on I-80 in the wrong direction, going east in the west bound lane, causing a chain reaction crash on both sides of I-80, and closing the road both ways. The drunken driver admitted to being drunk and having taken meth the night before. Trooper Corey McCallister, responded to the crash scene around 7 PM that January 22nd Sunday evening. That Tennessee man is now facing 11 charges in connection the crash, including aggravated homicide by vehicle and driving while under the influence of a controlled substance.

Driving eastbound in the westbound lane of I-80, the drunk driver's Dodge Ram 3500 pickup sideswiped a Fed-Ex commercial truck and hit a small Infiniti SUV head-on, The Infiniti SUV was trying to pass another commercial MS Freight truck. The MS Freight driver's truck began to spin, and it crossed the median into the east bound lane of I-80 where it hit head-on a red Ford F-150 carrying five young people, ages 18-23. The Ford was engulfed in flames, and all the young people were killed and burned unrecognizably. The lady driver of the MS Freight truck suffered third-degree burns to her lungs and throat, and she is now in stable condition in an induced coma in the burn center in Greeley, Colorado.

In a statement, by Jackson Hole Bible College, they said that the five Arkansas students "had spent the past week sitting in on classes and getting to know this year's student body, as well as catching up with staff who were previous classmates to three of them." According to KATV-TV in Little Rock, Arkansas, the five students killed were one young man, Salomon Correa, and four young ladies, Magdalene Franco, Ava Luplow, and two sisters, Andrea Prime and Suzy Prime. The five students were returning from that wonderful church-sponsored week at Jackson Hole Bible College. All of these current or former students were from Sylvan Hills High School, and they were members of Faith Bible Fellowship in North Little Rock. Less than two days after the crash, Suzy and Andrea's Prime's father, Phil Prime, said, “I forgive A. A. Nelson for causing the crash! I don't have vengeance in my heart. We could become angry, and we could become bitter, but all those things destroy you,” he told Cowboy State Daily. “Those feelings don't help you.” The state of Wyoming now is trying Nelson on five counts of

aggravated vehicular homicide for the deaths of the five from Arkansas and driving under the influence of a controlled substance causing serious bodily injury for the MS Freight driver. He also faces charges for reckless endangerment of the drivers and passengers in the other involved vehicles, along with driving the wrong way on a divided highway, with a suspended license from a previous DUI conviction. The Jackson Hole Bible College spokesman said, "There is no doubt that what they are currently seeing through their eyes is unspeakable joy, as they have finished the race set before them and are now enjoying fellowship with their Savior." Why would I share such grim headlines? First of all, I know many of us have had close contact with Jackson Hole Bible College, and our former church secretary, Alyssa Ertl, graduated from their Bible College. Secondly, I want us to know that this one verse Bible text, John 3:16 is not bad news, mixed news, but heavenly good news—the Gospel of Jesus in a nut-hell. Nicodemus was hearing the Gospel story by the Son of Man explaining to him how to be born-again.

This good news was being spoken on earth to Nicodemus as if it just came hot off the Associated Press teletype. This good news came with a newness, a freshness, and a tenderness that had to let Nicodemus know this news was especially for him, as it is for all of us yet today on February 5, 2023. Nicodemus was hearing the Son of Man descended from heaven, as Jesus told him in John 3:13, declare the greatest five-fold headlines the world has ever heard or seen. Did Nicodemus that night receive this good news to be born-again? We aren't told. Did he wait and share with his Sanhedrin fellow member, Joseph of Arimathea, so that they were born-again at the same time? We don't know, but both men somehow stayed secret disciples of Jesus, until in John 19:38, we hear from John that their secrecy ended as they begged Pilate for the body of Jesus, took his dead body down from the cross, buried Jesus' body in 75 pounds of spices, and placed Jesus' body in Joseph's own tomb, as Isaiah 53:8-9 declares, "By oppression and judgment, He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off, out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death."

I have no idea how Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea could keep Heaven's greatest headlines to themselves secretly for over three years. As we look at Heaven's Headlines today, know that these headlines are not news we should ever dream of throwing into the trash, or news we should ever stop to drop off at a recycling station, or news we should ever crumple up to use to start fires in our fireplace. These headlines are news like many of our sons and daughters used to get up early to deliver at every door on their route. God wants us to be newsboys for Him, evangelists without excuses, ready to take God's headlines to anyone and everyone God places in our lives. What is this good news? What are the five headlines of this Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?

YOU HAVE SOMEONE WHO LOVES YOU. (I.) We read in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." I have been privileged to preach these headlines all over the world, in Russia, Moldova, Africa, India, Mexico, Haiti, Romania, Ukraine, Hungary, Israel, Canada, New Zealand, Fiji Islands, Cook Islands

(Raratonga), Western Samoa, Northwest Territories, and all over the United States. When I flew in 1994 from Romania to Austria, I sat beside a beloved fellow missionary, Arthur Blessit. We fellowshiped, sang, talked, and prayed together on our way to Vienna, Austria. In 1968 God called Arthur to start carrying a 12 foot long, 6 foot wide, 45-lb. wooden cross with a tire on the back of the cross to every nation on earth, starting from Sunset Strip in Hollywood, California where he pastored. Today, this is his 55th year carrying the cross around the world to every nation. Walking over 43,340 miles through 324 countries, island groups & territories, 86 million steps, Arthur, and his wife Denise, share Jesus. He has said, “The greatest thing you and I can do is to help lead a lost person to come to faith in Jesus and really come to know Him as their Savior and Lord.” His wife Denise drives in front of him with supplies and she has been with Arthur in 294 countries. Arthur has been arrested 24 times put in jail, but at age 83, he is still carrying the cross, and leading people to Jesus, delivering heaven’s headlines—sharing, “For God So Loved The World.” I have preached John 3:16 more times than any other text. God gave me the outline of these five headlines first in 1990 in Iasi, Romania, where I preached in a Baptist church where 33 Gypsies came to faith in Jesus.

Now you may not think much of Heaven’s headlines, but I dare each one of us to consider the full rottenness of our own thought life at times. It is nothing short of an incredible miracle that we have someone who loves us. That Someone is God. “For God so loved the world...” These headlines are sent to every human being on this sinful planet, for all of us are worthy of eternal damnation, and punishment in hell forever. Somehow, in the sovereign grace of God, despite our sinfulness, God still loves us. Although we as God’s creation in mankind are horribly marred by sin, heaven’s headlines tell us God still recognizes His own work in creating us and He loves us everyone, from the loneliest rancher in Wyoming to the lowest Skid Row drunkard in downtown Chicago. P. P. Bliss caught the beauty of this headline and wrote the hymn, in 1870, “I am so glad that our Father in heaven, tells of His love in the Book He has given; Wonderful things in the Bible I see, this is the dearest, that Jesus loves me. I am so glad that Jesus loves me, Jesus loves me, Jesus loves me, I am so glad that Jesus loves me, Jesus loves even me.” Though I forget Him and wander away, Still He doth love me whenever I stray; Back to His dear loving arms would I flee, When I remember that Jesus loves me. Oh, if there’s only one song I can sing, When in His beauty I see the great King, This shall my song in eternity be: “Oh, what a wonder that Jesus loves me.” Doesn’t it thrill you? Isn’t the love of Jesus something wonderful? When was the last time you told someone who needed Jesus, “God loves you?” Beloved, tell others the headlines, “You have Someone who loves you, and that someone is God. Secondly,

YOU HAVE A GIFT IN GOD’S SON. (II.) “That He gave His only begotten Son.” What a headline from Glory! This is greater than winning the lottery by a trillion times. Yet many people who would do almost anything to get something free, and they pass up heaven’s headlines. Paul wrote in Romans 5: 6-8, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still

sinner, Christ died for us.” In John 10:11, Jesus announced His free gift, saying, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” Not long ago, Jinny and I were encouraged to watch a program called Alone # 7. It was the first 100-day challenge of 100 days in the Arctic for a million dollars. Talk about eager participants. Ten people, eight men and two women competed. By 40 days, six men out in the cold Arctic wild, on the border of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories, tapped out and were rescued. Only two men and two women were left. Amos made it 80 days, ran out of food, and his log hut caught on fire when he tapped out. Kailyn tapped out at 88 days: exhausted. The last lady, Carrie, with frostbite, tapped out at 92 days. She would have lost a few toes. Roland Welker, a rough-talking, rugged timberman stayed 100 days and won the prize. He spoke of his mother being a strong Christian. Roland spoke of himself as we, including his mother in his thoughts. Amazingly, when he won, he remembered hearing her sing, “Standing on the Promises of God, my Savior,” and he sang the song. This almost wild mountain man admitted he was no Christian. I’ve been praying Roland will come to receive the God of his mother. These ten, elite, trained experts in the wild, risked death with wolves, bears, muskox, wolverines, and freezing to death for a million dollars. God offers infinitely more a million dollars. Billions of people pass up His free gift. People stand in line to get something free but often find out there is a loaded catch to the offer. What they win is worthless, cheap, like dollar store pearls or a free case of pop, or they get their photo taken with a movie star. God’s free gift is unspeakable, free. I John 3:16 explains, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us.” How can we receive heaven’s headlines and refuse to be involved in God’s delivery system, going into all the world to share the Gospel that God the Father gave His only begotten Son to die in our place. Do you can remember when Jesus spoke life into you and you were born again? Testify; offer God’s free gift to others.

YOU ONLY HAVE TO BELIEVE. (III.) “That whosoever believes in Him...” God’s headlines stresses that salvation, being born again is God’s free offer for everyone, if we only trust Him. This part of heaven’s headlines has drawn millions to the Savior. God is telling not only that He loves all of us, but each one of us. Augustine said it back in the 4th century AD, “God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.” Yet the free gift is limited to those with belief that is saving faith. The greatness of whosoever is wonderful, but the wonder of the way in which we repent, believe, and receive Jesus is too amazing for words. This saving faith, this believing is only available to those of us believing we are bonafide sinners, for all have sinned. Regardless of our past, the way to receive Jesus is to only believe. Back before any of us were born, in 1920, Avis Marguerite Burgeson Christiansen wrote a song I love to sing. Some of you may remember her hymn, “Believe On The Lord Jesus Christ.” based on Paul’s words to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16: 25-34. Let me read the beautiful words Luke penned as the apostle Paul quoted Jesus in John 3:16. I have placed this simple hymn in your bulletin. I invite you to sing it with me. If you don’t know it, sing verse 2/3. 4thly,

YOU DON’T HAVE TO DIE. (IV.) “Should not perish...” These headlines are not about physical death, but about spiritual death forever, under the wrath of God

in hell. We read in Hebrews 9:26-28. "Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him." The Greek word for "should not perish" is **apollumi**. It means destroy utterly, to be spiritually lost, in spiritual destitution, to perish eternally, to be unsaved and condemned to hell forever. Know for certain this perishing does not mean annihilated. Perishing is divine, eternal condemnation. Jesus was telling Nicodemus and all of us, "You don't have to be eternally banished from the presence of God who loves you. You don't have to live in eternal torment in the home of the damned, where Jesus said, "the worm never dies, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:48) When was the last time you spent an hour delivering this news to someone you love, telling them, "You don't have to die."? When we as God's church are true to our calling, we cannot be a silent church. The Gospel is the good news it claims to be, and it has been entrusted to us as Christ's disciples. We incur guilt when we fail to pass it on. May God help us to open our mouths and unseal our lips to tell our dying world, "You don't have to die." (Should not perish) There remains one final headline, the fifth and the last, and the greatest, for this last headline completes and climaxes the other four.

YOU CAN HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. (V.) But have eternal/everlasting life." This verse is "Everybody's Text." Why? The mainspring of God's very being is love. Seeing our disobedience and rebellion, why didn't God say, "I'll show them, I'll break them. I'll humble them. I'll lash and scourge them. I'll punish them until they come back to Me." No! God didn't do that. He acted not for His sake, but for our sake, to satisfy His character, purpose, and design for us to live with Him forever. This text tells us the length, breadth, depth, and height of God's love. He loved the world so much; not just one nation, one ethnic group, or only loveable people. Jesus came to this wicked world to die on the cross, to be buried, and He rose from death, conquering death, hell, and the grave. "Death could not keep its prey." Paul wrote in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Eternal life is the very life of God Himself. To have eternal life changes every relationship in life, and envelops every relationship with peace, including peace with God. Eternal life gives us peace to stop resenting life and arguing with our lot in life. Eternal life gives us peace with ourselves because we know our weakness, and our proneness to fall to temptation. Eternal life means we face ourselves with God living in us.

Eternal life makes us certain our dearest joys on earth, are only a foretaste of greater joy coming in heaven. Our deepest peace on earth is but a shadow of the ultimate peace coming when we as believers get to heaven. Eternal life is having a hope, a goal, and an ultimate direction in life's journey. Eternal life is a glorious wonder down here on earth, but we know in the middle of our unexplainable trials and struggles; the best is yet to be. The best is yet to come. Do you know this eternal life? Share your testimony of the truth of John 3: 16 with others. Say this verse with me! Now say these five headlines. Never say, "I can't testify. I don't know what to say. John 3:16 is waiting for you to share with others. Let's pray.