

July 7, 2019 – Kev’s eGroup Sermon Notes

Ballantyne Campus

Guest preacher: Lisa Harper – *“AUTHOR. SPEAKER. MOM. Encouraging women through wit, authenticity and biblical wisdom”* (as quoted from her own web site).

See: <https://lisaharper.net/> and <https://lisaharper.net/about/>

Sermon Title: “Love Hard - Even When it is Hard”

Youtube video of sermon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJhVbZKJ64w>

Scripture:

- Acts 1: Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven: 1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit.” 6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”
- Acts 8 New International Version (NIV): 8 And Saul approved of their killing him. The Church Persecuted and Scattered. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Philip in Samaria: 4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city. Simon the Sorcerer: 9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. 12 But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. 14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply

been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. 18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." 24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." 25 After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

- Philip and the Ethiopian: 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." 34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" [37] [c] 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

#### Sermon Notes:

- Lisa caps off a month of great guest preaching.
- Opening comments: Good morning. It is an honor for me to speak to you for a second time. Every time I hear elevation worship music, I tear up and it's not because I am post - menopausal - is because God is so tangibly on display. Although I am undeserving of this platform I'm honored to be here. This being my second time here I consider this be a family meeting. It is so wonderful that I'm here to witness baptism Sunday - I got to baptize my daughter Missy in the Jordan River two months ago - with a little bit of sewage runoff in the water. I feel there is a theme that has been weaving through elevation Church this summer - with a focus on the essential aspects of spiritual maturity - and I would like to stay in this theme.
- **Opening prayer: Dear Lord allow us to become fully alive in the gospel and to the call that He has for our lives. King Jesus - the Lamb who was slain - the author in the perfecter of our faith - the Lily in the Valley - the Alpha and the Omega - wonderful counselor - Almighty God - our Messiah -**

this Jesus - thank you when you ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God Almighty you didn't leave us as orphans. Thank you left us your spirit in this love letter that we call the Bible. We pray that you just have your way through your spirit in this place and all the locations - But Jesus have your way through your spirit - that we see you more clearly and that would be undone by the gospel - that there will be a washing today - for those things that have been buried or numb in our hearts - that we would feel brand-new and be alive in the gospel. Lord Jesus we cannot accomplish this on our own - and recognize that we are desperate for your spirit - and we pray that you would accomplish this through your power in your spirit and for your purposes. Amen.

- Recall the story of Lisa on a motorcycle with her daughter Missy near Nashville Tennessee - while riding a Honda motorcycle with a sidecar – *in parts of the United States where straight haired moms don't have curly-haired kids.*
- I was not prepared for the sum of the vitriol that came our way as a single parent via a Blue pick-up truck.
- And now I needed to explain this situation to my daughter Missy.
- And I explained it this way: Some people have really little lives – and they choose to surround themselves with people who are just like them - and talk like them - and think like them - and sometimes their lives are so small that their hearts also gets small – and their hearts have no room to grow - and really little hearts are dangerous. And we need to talk about when we were around people who have little hearts. And I was going to explain to Missy about being alert - not bitter or resentful - but to just be aware of our surroundings.
- In Missy abruptly responded - oh yes Mam - I know what to do - we need to help them have bigger hearts!
- This was not the direction that I intended to go - however the Holy Spirit took over.
- I've learned 2 truths through the conduit of my child.
- **And here are the two truths that God has taught me:**
  - **Being liked (being popular) is not a prerequisite for being loving - being accepted has nothing to do sharing the love of Christ in your life.**
  - **As ambassadors to this new covenant and as a disciple of Christ - as men and women have been undone by his mercy - it is incumbent upon us to love hard - even when it's hard - when we don't demand reciprocity from culture. It is a misnomer in evangelical circles in America to think that we require power & acceptance in order to express the gospel. This is not biblically defensible - nowhere in the Bible do you see the type of Christianity that says our faith in Christ is dependent upon on being accepted - the gospel in fact teaches us that is contrary to that point.**
- The ancestors to the gospel were typically oppressed.
- **And it was their experience with oppression that stirred their spirit - and rose to the occasion when culture oppress them - this is an essential aspect of spiritual maturity.**
- **It's loving hard - even when it's hard.**
- It is a belief system that does not matter if your preferred candidate does not occupy a political office. It is a belief system where it doesn't matter if people don't like your twitter feed.
- It's a belief system that does not matter what your work colleagues think of you.
- **What really matters is while we were still sinners - Jesus showered us with lavish mercy.**
- **And we should be so undone when we understand this.**

- Where we just can't help but to share the gospel with those around us.
- Recall humorous story of Lisa on an airplane sitting next to a perky conversational woman named Heather.
- Heather could not stop sharing her love of Jesus to other people - if we remember that Jesus saved us from - we would all be more like Heather - compelled to share our hope of the world - even when it is hard - and awkward.
- Lets now go to Acts 1
- There are over 100 corroborated encounters with the risen Jesus in the Bible. In acts chapter 1 we learn of one of the final encounters - before his ascension.
- At this point the Christian movement consists of about 110 people - a rather small group.
- At this point in Acts 1, they asked Jesus if he will restore the Kingdom of Israel?
- What the disciples were asking is if things were going to get any easier - in other words this earthly throne - so they (the disciples) will not have to be oppressed anymore.
- And Jesus responds simply: No. It's not getting easier for you. However - you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you - and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem.
- The phraseology here is important - and sometimes it's best to read Luke and then go right to Acts - and just skip over John - since the symmetry between Luke and Acts is quite compelling.
- Note there is no qualification here as to the disciples receiving power from the Holy Spirit during periods of oppression - the Greek translation of this imperative means to grasp or to seize.
- And the initiative lies with the speaker
- What this means basically is that this is your irrevocable calling.
- This call that Jesus gives his followers says that you will receive power - and you will be my witnesses - it was not dependent upon personality type - and where you stack up on the ideogram scale - and does not depend on your past.
- **Whether you're Pentecostal and want to jump over pews - or where this is your first time at church - or you are watching this YouTube video at a bar and not sure what to think about all of these crazy Christians - If you put your hope in Jesus - you will receive power and you will share the hope that lies within you - this is in your revocable call - and of course we mature in the boldness by which we share the gospel - at some point you cannot prevent yourself from sharing the hope of the gospel with others.**
- In the book of Acts, they share the gospel even when it's very hard - not just to a grumpy frequent flyer that doesn't want to engage with other people.
- **In Acts, the disciples are being both murdered and martyred for their audacious claim that Jesus actually connects them with Jehovah. It is not based on keeping 613 Torah laws - but rather it is based on recognizing your neediness - that you can't keep it by yourself and that you are desperate for a Savior.**
- In all of the disciples are getting killed for this.
- See Acts 8 - the stoning to death of Stephen.
- And the guy that supervised this tragic death of Stephen was Saul - who would go on to be converted in Damascus - and then go on to write two thirds of the New Testament.
- Your past does not dictate your future.
- **Peter preached the first two evangelical sermons were over 8000 people got saved. This was about two months after Peter "through Jesus under the bus" during his trial.**

- **Peter had completely sabotaged his own future as a spiritual leader – and yet became a rock where this frail church was placed on his shoulders.**
- **For these early Christians undergoing intense amounts of oppression - it would've been easier for them to get back the bus up - where the environment was more open to evangelism. And they did the exact opposite - they could not mute the miracle.**
- They had to share the hope of the gospel - and share in really tough places.
- Philip went to Samaria to preach the gospel - this was not easy - because Jews were forbidden to be with people of Samaria - this is considered enemy territory.
- Then Philip was directed to go to Ethiopia to visit a eunuch person in the heat of the day.
- See Deuteronomy 23. Jews were told that eunuchs (men without all of the proper equipment) were not allowed to participate in worship.
- So, Philip just witnessed his best friend getting stoned to death – then goes to Samaria (supposedly the arch enemy of God), and then goes to Ethiopia via a very difficult road and during a difficult time of the day - to speak to a marginalized, ostracized, and ignored individual.
- When Philip is directed to do this, he does not delay – in fact he runs.
- Think about your life are minute.
- During this summer, when have you figuratively run toward someone to share the gospel.
- **When was the last time that your heart was so excited for the gospel - that you ran to someone to share Jesus?**
- When was the last time that you ran to someone to share the gospel - where no one else was running towards them?
- When was last time you ran to someone that was marginalized or stigmatized? Or someone that you don't agree with politically?
- **During theology training in Colorado, a theology professor told me the following: "if it doesn't preach in Sudan, it should not be preached in America."**
- **If it doesn't preach in the neighborhood that you're not comfortable in – it should not be preached in South Charlotte.**
- If we are growing in maturity - growing in our awareness of what a miracle it is - for God who breathed the universe into existence actually delights in us – with one glance He captured my heart.
- I was very broken in my 20s and 30s.
- and I thought that Jesus delivered me because he felt sorry for me.
- What I learned later is that Jesus delighted in me.
- And I thought there was just no way that Jesus could delight in a damaged girl like me.
- As God has lifted the layers of shame off me - and I became more understanding of my own lost-ness - before I encountered the Christ.
- I can't help but to share love with other people - it does not matter if they like me or not - or they are Republican or Democrat - black or yellow or purple - or spotted – or southern – or northern - or African - or Haitian. They are my family.
- They are my brothers and sisters.
- **In every single person I relate with - there is the image of God.**
- Two months ago, I had the privilege of going to South Africa.

- While traveling with Hill Song Church to attend a conference in Cape Town, I asked if I could visit Gugulethu (see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gugulethu>). This was 2.5 sq mile ostracized community - where a certain people were not allowed to live in Cape Town due to their skin color.
- Quote from wikipedia.org: *"In August 1993, Gugulethu was the site of the violent murder of a young white American woman, Amy Biehl, in the upheaval following the official end of apartheid and before the multi-racial election of 1994."*
- Quote from Wikipedia.org: *In March 1986, South Africa's Apartheid security murdered seven young black men. The incident became known as the Gugulethu Seven. The seven men were; Zandisile Zenith Mjobo; Zola Alfred Swelani, Mandla Simon Mxinwa, Godfrey Jabulani Miya, Themba Mlifi, Zabonke John Konile and Christopher ' Rasta' Piet. They were the military wing of the African National Congress known as the ANC. In 2017 Major-General Andre Lincoln made stated in the 1980s that police officers removed evidence from the scenes of what was government ordered crimes in murders such as the Gugulethu Seven.*
- Additional notes by KH as quoted in wikipedia.org: *"In 1998 four men were convicted of Amy's murder. They were pardoned by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The murder took place a year before Nelson Mandela's release from prison. Ms. Biehl's family supported the release of the four men. They started the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust in the townships to work with youth. The foundation's goal to empower young disadvantaged youth by using education and culture to deter crime and drugs. An Amy Biehl Memorial site was created in Gugulethu and tours into the township to see the memorial and visit some of the schools where programs were created by the Amy Biehl Foundation."*
- **Two of the four boys that murdered Amy Biehl now work for the nonprofit created by Biehl's family.**
- I want to go to this place - which was a place of such apartheid violence and also a place of such restoration.
- Hill Song had planted a church in Gugulethu - that consists of 98% black South African – and is considered one of the 15<sup>th</sup> most violent places in the world.
- And I was able to share the gospel with about 150 people at that church along with my daughter Missy.
- During the worship service I noticed one woman in the audience that was not pleased with me. After the service I sat next to this woman - where I stated that her countenance reflects the fact that I said something that offended her and there appears to be animosity between her and me. Her response was: I just can't figure out why you're here. I responded by saying that my daughter is Haitian (and of African descent) - and by this you are my family. The woman then responded: I've never had anyone like you embrace me as family.
- **Isn't it time to change the way Christians are perceived?**
- **Isn't it time to love hard even when it's hard?**
- **Isn't it time for us to run to the unlikely - in the marginalized?**
- **Because we cannot not share the hope that lies within us**
- **Closing prayer: Lord - Quicken our hearts - give us the grace that it takes to love hard - even when it's hard - remember our own lost-ness - how You lavished on us even with Your love - while we are still sinners - but let there be an awakening in this place - a revival that starts with all of us – for us to run to the people that God is placed all around us - to share the hope that lies within us this.**