

“Diving Deep - By Water and the Spirit”

Scripture: John 3:5

Graphics: scuba gear, water, diving, bible

Big Truth: The word of God guides our lives, but so often we skim the surface with our reading or bible study. This series will take us deeper into common verses that hold incredible meaning for our lives. The people of the Panama UMC are called to dive deeper into the Word for life.

Focus Phrase: Salvation is at the core of God’s love for the world.

1. Introduction

- A. I’ve never tried scuba diving, but I think it’s something I’d like to learn how to do. The closest I’ve gotten to scuba diving is snorkeling on the Gulf of Mexico one time. Skimming on the surface and occasionally diving to a shallow depth was pretty incredible...the fish we saw, the coral reef colors, and the sun’s rays cutting through the crystal clear blue water...warm and wonderful...all incredible. Wanna get away?
- B. I have friends who DO scuba dive a LOT...and I always love the pictures they post on social media.
- C. What I’ve come to realize is that snorkeling is fun and all, but if you stay on the surface of the water or only dive to a shallow depth, you certainly can see some things, but there’s SO MUCH MORE to see if you dive deeper.
- D. As we begin this New Year, we’ll be diving deeper! I want to thank Sam and Pastor Tim for leading worship last week to get us ready!
- E. This morning, we’re beginning a brand new worship series called Diving Deep. When it comes to the Word of God contained in the Bible, we all are tempted to skim the surface when we read or study or pray. We find ourselves with more on the to-do list than hours in the day...and sometimes that translates to snorkeling through our devotions and bible reading and prayer.
- F. When we DO that, we can certainly find nuggets of wisdom and some truth for life application. But do we get up close and personal with what God is saying? Do we see things a few feet down, but never spend time among the rich truths of God’s living word?
- G. If we’ve learned anything from this relentless pandemic, it’s that there is no normal anymore...and everything in life fades and withers like the grass and flowers, but the Word of God endures forever (as it says in Isaiah 40:8).
- H. So, for the next few weeks in worship, we’ll be diving deep into THAT word. What do I mean by that? Well, what I mean is that we’ll be looking at a SINGLE bible verse per week. And with that single bible verse, we’ll be diving as deeply as we can into the meaning and application of that verse.

- I. Now, whenever you take ONE verse and pluck it out of scripture and read it or memorize it, even, there's ALWAYS a danger that that verse not only loses it's meaning, but that it actually begins to mean something completely different than what it actually means IN CONTEXT.
- J. One of my seminary professors had a phrase that he always liked to say, "A text without a context is just a pretext to mean whatever you'd like." Said another way, "Unless the verse we're reading is anchored in its context, then we're always in danger of having it lose its meaning."
- K. We see this all the time with bible verses on bumper stickers and billboards. One verse, splashed around to make a point. Many people don't even know what the bible is or know Jesus.
- L. Diving deep into ONE verse isn't about pithy proclamations. Diving Deep is about spending time with the verse, in context, so that we can gain more insight AND APPLICATION for that verse and its context for our lives. By diving deep, we find the truth and the truth sets us free to then go and love and share our faith in Jesus with others.
- M. Each of these verses is well-known and may even be your life-verse or a verse you've studied before. Most likely, you've heard each of these verses.
- N. And just like the top safety rules for scuba diving, we'll do this together, we won't hold our breath (we'll relax), we'll pay attention to our surroundings, and we'll ascend slowly and carefully, so that we can dive again next week.
- O. Let's PRAY and then we'll put on our diving gear and get into the water...
- P. PRAY!**
- Q. The first verse we'll dive to is John 3:5...

2. Scripture

A. READ John 3:5

B. Here's the context for the text...

- i. John 3:5 falls into one of my favorite books of the bible and one of my favorite chapters in one of my favorite books of the bible.
- ii. The whole beginning section of John's gospel is one encounter after another of Jesus and individuals that are being invited into the Kingdom of God.
- iii. In John 1, we read who Jesus is...the Word made flesh and dwelling among us. The light of the world.
- iv. In John 2, Jesus is at the wedding in Cana turning water into wine.
- v. In John 4, Jesus meets with the woman at the well and tells her everything she's ever done.

- vi. And right in the middle of all that, while Jesus was still in Jerusalem, we have this long story in John 3 about Jesus' meeting with a Pharisee - a religious leader - named Nicodemus.
 - vii. It's also during this story that we read John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."
 - viii. Nicodemus had heard about Jesus...and was drawn to Him. Nicodemus wanted to know MORE about Jesus. Yet, at this point in the timeline of Jesus' life, the Pharisees were becoming less and less patient with Jesus. They found him to be more and more a threat to their leadership and authority. Jesus was persona non-grata!
 - ix. So, Nicodemus went to Jesus at night...alone...that way, they could meet without being seen by others.
 - x. Jesus said to Nicodemus (verse 3), "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above." Other translations are "born anew" or the more-popular "born again".
 - xi. The phrase, "Very truly, I tell you..." is a common phrase in that culture that means, "I really really really really mean what I'm about to say..." The old King James Version was, "verily, verily, I say to you..."
 - xii. This statement by Jesus about being born again (born anew) was at the center of Jesus' message to the world...and to Nicodemus that night.
 - xiii. Yet, Nicodemus was confused by it. How can a person be born a second time from a mother's womb?
 - xiv. Then we get to our diving deep verse for today. "Very truly (there it is again), I tell you, (Nicodemus) no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."
 - xv. No one (not any person alive)...can enter the Kingdom of God (can be part of God's plan for the salvation for the world with Jesus at the center)...without being (unless you are)...born of water...AND Spirit.
 - xvi. And Jesus went on to say that what is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is Spirit.
- C. So, in order to enter the Kingdom of God and, by grace, be given everlasting life with God, every person must be born once in the flesh and born a second time in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - D. I'd say we're just now moving our way deeper into the meaning of this...and probably we haven't seen anything yet that's challenging.
 - E. Yet, the deeper we go, the more we see. Here are some cautions with this verse.

- i. First, scholars and church traditions disagree about what Jesus was truly saying about being born again when he said this to Nicodemus.
- ii. What did Jesus mean when he said, "...you must be born of water and the Spirit." Was this about baptism? Was this some plug for a belief that a person needed to be baptized in order to be saved...and then the Holy Spirit would save them, if they were baptized?
- iii. The answer, based on Jesus' clarification in verse 6, is NO. A person does NOT need to be baptized in order to be born again. In fact, Jesus was saying that we have two births: the first is a **natural** birth from a mother's womb, and the second is a **spiritual** birth by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- iv. Now, water baptism is a **SIGN** of salvation...meaning that if someone has experienced the first and second births (natural and spiritual) by the free gift of God's grace in their lives, then being baptized, whatever the age, is a public declaration of God's grace working in that person's life.
- v. But baptism is not what Jesus is talking about here, necessarily. Jesus is trying to get Nicodemus to understand that salvation comes to a living human only through the belief that Jesus is the Son of God and died for their sins, and rose again to everlasting physical life, all initiated by the presence of God's grace in one's life through the Holy Spirit.
- vi. The other caution here is that some believe that you must be born again through faith in Jesus, and then be further born again by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley and the Methodists (us included) believe that the moment we accept the truth-claims of Christ and are born again by faith, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and enter the Kingdom of God. Born again by the Spirit.
- vii. "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

3. Application

- A. So what does this all mean for us today? Diving deep to simply see what you can see seems to miss the mark on what the Word of God truly wants to teach you. It's like scuba diving and not learning anything from what you see.
- B. If you were just snorkeling - skimming the surface of this verse - you'd be able to see that God can save people and that the Holy Spirit has something to do with it. You might even look ahead to John 3:16 and feel loved by God.
- C. Yet, the deep dive shows us SO much more:
 - i. First, **salvation IS the core of God's message** for the world.
 - a. Verily verily I say to you...

- b. We do INDEED look to John 3:16 to give us the DETAILS of the TRUTH about salvation...that God loved the world in such a way that He gave Jesus...so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.
 - c. All Jesus' talk about the Kingdom...all Jesus' teaching about sin and repentance and forgiveness...all Jesus' commands about love...have EVERYTHING to do with salvation from an eternity apart from God, TO a life everlasting WITH God.
 - d. Every WORD from Creation in Genesis to Amen in Revelation is about God saving the world...and YOU in it!
- ii. Second, **salvation is available to every person** (including you).
- a. Every person born, ever. You. Me. The curmudgeon that lives next door. The person that cut you off in traffic. The estranged Dad or spouse. Salvation is available to every person.
 - b. Jesus died for all people...and therefore, all people have the opportunity to accept that gift of salvation that's at the core of God's Word.
 - c. If you feel unworthy because of something you've done or said or has been done to you, that doesn't negate the work that Jesus did on the cross to save you. The reality is you are NOT worthy...but Jesus IS worthy and his grace is completely sufficient for your salvation. Take it!
- iii. Third, **it's not enough to simply come to church or read your bible**, as important as those are to discipleship and growth
- a. It takes an intentional acceptance of the grace of God to be born again.
 - b. And, look, I probably get saved 300 times per year. I certainly got saved this week. This is not just something you did in middle school and BAM...you're good!
 - c. There may have been a moment in your life when you KNEW that you KNEW that you were saved. But every morning is the next invitation and offer from God to submit to Jesus in obedience.
 - d. Coming to church for worship is great...but it doesn't make you a Christian...only Jesus does that. Being baptized doesn't save you...only Jesus does that.
 - e. And if that means you have to come to the foot of the Cross every day and lay it down for His will and the sake of the Kingdom, then so be it. Just come and lay it down again.
- iv. Fourth, **it's all about the Holy Spirit**.
- a. I think we don't talk about the Holy Spirit enough. We talk about Jesus a lot. We talk about God the Father. Yet, Jesus left us the Holy Spirit -

HIS Holy Spirit - so that we would know the Father and the truths in the Bible.

- b. The Holy Spirit is the pathway to salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast."
 - c. The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual gifts and the gifts of the Spirit.
 - d. The Holy Spirit is your comforter and guide and the very presence of God in your life...in your body, mind, and soul.
 - e. In 2022, cultivate a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit and let the salvation He offers fill you and fill the church!
- v. Finally, **Jesus is inviting YOU today to be born again today.**
- a. Jesus' invitation is for every one of us. To let Him keep changing our lives to be born again...to be born of Spirit.
 - b. Maybe you were saved many years ago...maybe last week.
 - c. I prayed at a prayer meeting this week that for 2022, I prayed that just **one person** would come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior in 2022 in this church. I hope for SO many more than one, but I pray that ONE comes to know Him. Join me in that prayer...
 - d. Maybe that day is today...maybe that ONE is you.
 - e. In a moment, I'll pray for us...for me, for you, for the church...

4. Conclusion

- A. Diving deep takes us to places we wouldn't go unless we were drawn by the Spirit to go there. It's not always easy, but it's worth it.
- B. Diving deep gives us a new perspective and a new vision for God's word.
- C. Diving deep takes us deeper into God's love for us IN His word.
- D. Diving deep is where we meet with Jesus and Jesus meets with us.
- E. Pray!**
- F. Connect Card - we will be praying for you...