

In the Triune God, You Are Signed, Sealed, and Delivered!

A sermon based on John 3:1-17.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You know who would make a pretty good theologian...an “expert” on religion? Stevie Wonder. You heard me right, Stevie Wonder. Probably weren’t expecting that, were you.

Now, of course, I say this tongue-in-cheek. I don’t know what his religious views are. But I do know if you listened to some of his songs and imagined the lyrics were about Jesus, he’d be pretty spot on. One song in particular is *Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I’m Yours*. I was chatting about these verses from John 3 with a couple other of our pastors up here in Alaska this past week, and one of them brought up this song title as being a good connection with Trinity Sunday (and again, that word Trinity, or Triune, refers to our God being three in one...three persons in one God). Well, here are some Stevie’s lyrics: **“Like a fool I went and stayed too long, now I’m wondering if your love’s still strong...oh, you’ve got the future in your hand... seen a lot of things in this old world, when I touched them they did nothing...I’ve done a lot of foolish things that I really didn’t mean, I could be a broken man...[but] here I am, signed, sealed, delivered.”** Not too bad, right (once you get past it being a love song and all)?

I’ll give you a few seconds to sing the song out in your head, if you know it, so we can get back to this. Because today, even better, here’s our Triune God’s love song to you, **“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.”** Today, Trinity Sunday, through those words, we are reminded how in the Triune God, you are signed, sealed, and delivered!

“For God so loved the world.” I’m sure most, if not all, of you are familiar with those words. John 3:16 is probably the most well-known verse from Scripture. We even call it the “gospel in a nutshell;” it’s one of the clearest and simplest summaries of the good news of salvation. But what we do is, we often tend to put it in its own bubble...that is, we don’t look at its surrounding context and see how it fits in.

So let’s do that this morning. This is part of an ongoing dialogue between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus, a Pharisee. Pharisees, if you remember, were the group of religious leaders who were focused on works-righteousness, this idea that by their adhering to God’s Old Testament laws – and even going above and beyond that in adhering to their own, manmade laws – they could do enough to earn God’s favor. Not to say that was Nicodemus’ personal belief, but that was the influence he had surrounded himself with.

Do you see the problem with that mindset...with that teaching? It was very much an Old Testament way of thinking (and a grave misunderstanding at that). God gave the Israelites all these rules, regulations, commands...pretty much dictated nearly every aspect of their lives so as to keep them separated from their heathen neighbors, but even more importantly, to keep their lines pure for the promised Savior.

And the underlying command to all that was **“Be holy (perfect), as I the LORD your God am holy.”** Or, what Jesus said to another expert in the law, who wanted to know how he could inherit eternal life, **“Do this (keep all of God’s laws), and you will live.”**

And the Pharisees thought they could, and they thought they were doing that.

“Like a fool...” Stevie sings. That was them. Is that you? I mean, God’s laws haven’t changed. His requirements for heaven remain the same...be perfect, and heaven’s yours.

We’d have to be fools to think we’ve met that requirement, wouldn’t we? But don’t we sometimes go down that road? I was talking to someone one about another member who very delinquent, and the conversation turned towards, “But look at all the stuff he’s done here. He was active in this group. He was instrumental in completing that project. He had so many great ideas. He was always so eager to get involved.”

I’m sure you could make a list of all the great things you’ve done here, add all the charitable organizations you’ve contributed to, the family person you are, the faithful employee you’ve been, and what does that all add up to? You may be a good person, even a great person. But wouldn’t we be fools to think that’s good enough for God? Right, Jesus doesn’t say, “that whoever does a lot of good things will not perish, but have eternal life.”

The truth is, **“I’ve done a lot of foolish things,”** as Stevie laments. We can’t have our list of accomplishments without the even longer list of our screw-ups (to put it nicely). Walk through even the 10 Commandments, and you see. Using God’s name in vain, that’s me. Despising preaching and God’s Word – not giving it the honor and treatment it deserves, that’s me. Disobeying and disrespecting parents and others in authority, that’s me. Getting angry, even hating others, that’s me. Impure thoughts and words, that’s me. Stealing, cheating, that’s me. Hurting others’ reputations, that’s me. Coveting, being greedy for something God doesn’t want me to have, that’s me. And to top it all off, the 1st Commandment has been the worse, not that I’ve been bowing down to idols...well, I guess I have because I’m my idol. I do what I want instead of God.

Again, a lot of foolish things, which means everything else I’ve done, no matter how great, how helpful, how loving...it’s nothing. It’s what Jesus meant when he told Nicodemus, **“Flesh gives birth to flesh.”** We all have sinful flesh, handed down by past, sinful generations...which moves us to sin ourselves.

And, along with Isaiah in our 1st Lesson, we have to admit, **“I am a man (or woman) of unclean lips.”** Even worse, we are people with unclean and sinful hearts. We deserve to perish.

As Stevie swoons, **“I could be a broken man, but here I am signed, sealed, and delivered.”** Or even better, Jesus’ words, **“For God so loved the world...”** The Triune God so loved the world. The Triune God so loved you.

How do we see him, the Triune God in that one verse? Here’s where Stevie Wonder’s got us covered...again, **“Here I am, signed, sealed, delivered, I’m yours...”**

God the Father so loved you that he sent his one and only Son. He **signed** a new covenant when no one could keep the old covenant perfectly. The new covenant was love in the form of his Son...his one and only Son, sent to earth for you and me.

God the Son so loved you that he lived, and died, and rose for you. Jesus, he did keep that old covenant perfectly. He obeyed all of God’s laws without sin. But then the Son of Man **sealed** your salvation – your forgiveness – with the new covenant of his blood shed when he was lifted up on the cross like Moses lifted up the snake in the dessert. And his resurrection means that those who look to him in

faith, just like those who gazed upon the bronze snake Moses set up in the wilderness with believing hearts, are healed...and have life...and for us, eternal life.

And that's really the work of God the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit so loved you that he's given you belief in Jesus and his work that brings eternal life. He's **delivered** Jesus' salvation to us, and he delivers us to eternal life. Wasn't that what Jesus was getting at when he told Nicodemus, ***"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again," and then, "the Spirit gives birth to spirit"?*** The only way Jesus' work becomes our and means anything for us and results in eternity in the kingdom of God for us is through the work of the Holy Spirit bringing us to faith in Jesus...making us born again through the waters of baptism.

You see, we needed a Triune God to love us. We needed a Triune God to save us...the Father to sign that new covenant of love and grace, the Son to seal our salvation with blood shed on the cross, and the Holy Spirit to deliver that forgiveness to us through his gift of faith in Jesus.

And now, he's ours, and, more importantly, we're his. That's it. God so loved the world...God so loved you that, through the work of the Triune God, you are his.

You know, this weekend, Memorial Day weekend, we can't help but remember the labor and sacrifice of so many men and women to win, preserve, and defend the rights and freedoms we have today, and be thankful for them. Patriotic songs like "God Bless the USA" and "God Bless America" go a long way in helping us to do exactly that. We won't forget.

Today, Trinity Sunday, we won't forget the even greater work of our Triune God to win us freedom from sin through the sacrifice of the Son. Stevie Wonder's song, *Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours* might be a catchy way to be reminded of each person's work. But God's love song to us is even better, again, ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in his shall not perish but have eternal life."*** If you don't know that good news by heart, I would encourage you to commit it to memory. Remember it, not just this weekend, but always. And thank God, not that he's blessed the country, but that he's blessed you...the Triune God, who loves the world. The Triune God, who loves you...signed, sealed, and delivered. Amen.