

**Breath of Heaven Transition – Prayer – I want you to close your eyes. Slow down your heartbeat. Breathe in and out. And remember that the word for Spirit in the Bible is breath. The breath of heaven. And I think God gave us that analogy to remind us that we need his spirit like we need oxygen. That he wants to be with us all day – like our breath. That he is in us and around us – like our breath. That he transforms our experience – like our breath. So take a couple of minutes now and become aware of God’s presence with you.**

Every blessing that God has for you for 2023 will be crammed into the next two weeks as you experience the breath of heaven. That his loving fullness will be made known to you in every increasing ways...

**Did you know that’s what God wants? For you to know and experience his love?**

Love is a funny thing. People experience Love, and yearn for love, but don’t always know what it is... for instance, you know that tingly little feeling you get when you are really starting to like someone? That... that’s just common sense leaving your body.

Meme: I love you with all my butt. I would say heart, but it’s just not as big.

Today, I made significant changes to the message based on my prayer times on Saturday. Don’t get me wrong... I had a good message planned – well, at least my average somewhere between mediocre and tolerable message. And the lord led me to cut John the Baptist content, slow down, and give you some moments to respond. And just to focus on blowing up one verse on the theme of LOVE. So if this message seems out of the norm, that is the story.

Back to love – it is pretty common knowledge that love is not a feeling, it is a decision. And everybody who has been married a month knows that feeling comes and goes, so it is a good thing it is not based on a feeling. But love actually has a deeper ontology. It is based in the very fabric of the universe. The uncreated being. The first one who is himself love.

**For God so loved Many of you know the verse...**

Like the Universe, it starts with God... the origin of everything. The first thought, the first light, the mind behind the mystery. God... the designer of dimensions, the engineer of organisms, the maker of mechanics. God... the shaper of stars, the bringer of black holes, the developer of dark matter. God... the one who created minds that can think his thoughts after him, evaluate, aspire, reflect and act. That God...

He is all about love. It is his main thing. Did you know that Islam has 99 names for God and not one is Love? And did you know that when John wanted to summarize who God is in three words, he said. “God is Love”.

And the existence of love is an argument for God. In a materialistic world without God, love does not exist. It is reduced to a series of chemical reactions, behavioral reinforcements, and evolutionary

advantage. But if it is lifted beyond a selfish benefit, if a person in battle loves his comrades to the point of jumping on a grenade to save them, if love actually exists ontologically then there must be a great lover who gave us the capacity to transcend the material world. If love is merely chemicals plus enlightened self interest, it is not love at all.

But if you have experienced love – love for a spouse, or a child, or a military buddy or a dying parent, you know that it is so much more. In fact, love, loyalty, compassion, fairness, generosity, honor, humility – none of these can be explained by pure physiology. WE live every day as if these are all real. But In order for personhood to be real, for love to be real, for humility to be real, there must be an origin. And the Bible's explanation is so good. God loves us SO much that he imprinted us with love – transcendently demonstrating both power and goodness in doing so.

### the WORLD

- God's love is not limited to a chosen few – it extends to everybody. Someone say everybody!
- Past, present and future
- Saved and unsaved
- In all it's ethnic diversity
- In all of it's economic diversity
- God had as his agenda to spread the good news to the WORLD. Israel was just the beginning.
- Ever notice that Israel is at the crossroads of three continents?
- Did you ever notice that there are key factors that were ONLY in place at the time of Jesus that meant that the gospel would go swiftly to the world and not just stay as a localized religion?

Factor 1 - Jewish Spirituality - God had been preparing a people to respond to Him in faith and one another in love for 2000 years. He had developed a full system of history, poetry, prophecy, pictures, analogies and stories. These pervaded the entire Jewish mindset. For 2000 years they had yearned for a Messiah. For 400 they had waited without fresh revelation. They were optimally primed with the right world view to receive God's son and embrace the truth.

### Room 217 Chart



### Factor 2 - Greek Language

Greek Language and Education - From the time of Alexander the Great in the 4th Century BC, Greek language and thought were the common tools of Academia. Greek became the language of learning and commerce - so everyone in the empire had a common 'second language'. This meant that the New Testament could be written in a language understood across cultures. Not until the English Language in the 20th century has there been a

more commonly held language worldwide.

### Factor 3 - Roman Roads Map

Roman Domination - The empire of Rome was unique in history because of its scope, engineering and development. The "Pax Romana", or Roman Peace, made it possible for people to move from country to country with very few barriers and more safety than at any time in history up to that point. Roman Roads were the very best roads that had been developed (or would be developed for another 1500 years) to help with armies and commerce to go quickly from one side of the empire to another. These factors also made it possible for the gospel to spread quickly and safely through the disciples and early missionaries of Jesus.



I am convinced that God was not only weaving together Biblical History to accomplish his means, but all of world history. This is how much he loves the world.

**Summary Map** – Bullseye – Israel, overlaid with Roman roads and Greek language

In fact, there was this window of time from about 70 BC to 400 AD that this could work. After that, the Roman empire collapsed. Travel was more dangerous. Roads were not maintained. And Greek was less and less common as a universal language. Not until the 20th century did these things all line up again. And by then... the gospel had spread all around the world - just as God intended.

**PAUSE NOW – and drink in the love of God. The God who loved the world. The God who organized history reach people because of his love. Ask him to grasp how wide and long and high and deep his love is.**

**That he gave his only son....**

And so he crossed the dimensional paradigm to become a human being. There are so many ways to think of this:

- Light crashed into darkness
- The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us
- The king left the palace to camp in my backyard
- The wealthy left the mansion for the arms of an impoverished teenager
- The Lion became a sacrificial lamb
- The Beautiful One invaded the planet of ugliness
- The Holy One splashed into sin
- The prince condescended a pauper
- Eternity was condensed into a moment
- Greatness was embodied in humility
- Infinity was pressed into an Infant

And all of that is pressed into the small phrase... he gave his only son. Now that is love!

Can you imagine giving your perfect and Holy infant son away to live in the middle of the garbage heap of humanity, get diseased, work with ordinary people, be abused by sin, be confronted by his creation, challenged by people he made, hated by those he created for love, and then to die – taking on all of their garbage heap of sin.

He gave his only son. I have two sons and I can't imagine giving them up to die. Even for the whole lot of you. But that is why we are all glad that God is God. Greater love has no one than this... that he would give up his life for a friend.

### **That whoever believes in him**

Look at that generosity! Jesus came for everyone who would believe. Now, this would be a shocker to his original audience. Because the religious elite thought he would come for the religious elite! The Jews thought he was coming for the Jews. And the prostitutes and tax collectors never thought the Messiah would care a lick about them. But Jesus called tax collectors – Matthew and Zacchaeus. And tax collectors got baptized while Pharisees refused. And Jesus said 'these dudes are getting into the kingdom of heaven ahead of you-oooh'

OK... hold the presses! The tax collectors? C'mon. The tax collectors are a part of this new family of God? Do you know who they are? Like they are Roman collaborators... they are betrayers of their own people. They are the worst because they turned on their own! And some of you are asking right now... do you think IRS agents can get into heaven? No way!

Yup... they acknowledged that God's way was right. They were baptized into repentance – turning away from nonsense and sin and stupidity. And they were awaiting the truth – Jesus. So they said 'yes'. BUT the pharisees and experts in the law missed it. The religious folks missed it. They didn't acknowledge Jesus as God. They didn't turn TO Jesus because they never turned FROM sin! So they were not baptized by John... so they missed the messiah that they were not looking for.

Now this "Whoever believes" is both infinitely open and completely closed at the same time. Whoever means – whoever – infinitely open. Regardless of your status in society... regardless of language... regardless of behavior, gender, ethnicity.... Regardless of how bad your past is... regardless of how wealthy or not wealthy you may be. It is WHOEVER. Whoever wants it. Whoever sees it. Whoever believes... God is just big that way. This is why we have 2 billion people from around the planet who name the name of Jesus. He is just that loving that he invites everybody.

Oh, and there is the limiter. Because it is ONLY for people who believe. The tax collectors did and the pharisees didn't. That's the line – some are in and some are out. But it is not because God has a limited invitation list... it is because some people never RSVP. Some people are just trusting in other things besides God. They don't believe that Jesus was God's son... they don't believe that it is that easy... they don't believe it is worth it to follow him. But God is so loving that he doesn't force people to believe. He gives them the ability to choose – yes or no. And God respects their decision.

So infinite invitations, but the party will be limited to those who say yes. And what do they get? This massive turnaround of fortunes.

### **Should not perish, but have everlasting life**

#### **Music starts here**

The natural way of life is death and the natural path of sin is spiritual death. That is what perish means. It is relating to the death of the person, of the you that is you. It isn't saying you won't experience physical death, but that death is not the end of you. Instead, you can have life that begins now and continues indefinitely.

This is how it looks. You have a physical birth... and that goes for an average of 80 or so years - sometimes longer, sometimes shorter... and then you die. It is a birth that leads to death.

BUT!!! You can get a second birth, or being born AGAIN. And this birth is spirit and it lasts forever. Jesus said "flesh gives birth to flesh, but spirit gives birth to spirit." Wow. That is LOVE! A new birth in the midst of this life that lasts forever. And you can say yes when you are five, forty five or eighty five. But you gotta be like the tax collectors and actually say yes, not the pharisees who were so religious that they missed it.

Everlasting life? As a total gift? Through the sacrifice of the son? Now that is love. I wanted to condense this a bit into more explosive language today. The language of love at Christmas time. Here goes:

**God – the Ultimate Being**

**Loved – the Ultimate Virtue**

**World – the Ultimate Audience**

**Gave -the Ultimate Act**

**Son – the Ultimate Sacrifice**

**Whoever – the Ultimate invitation**

**Believes – The Ultimate Trust**

**Perish – the Ultimate penalty**

**Have – the Ultimate Promise**

**Eternal – the Ultimate Timeline**

**Life – the Ultimate gift**

I am going to close in prayer, but not until I give you some time for reflection. I just want you to have a moment before you leave to relax, bask in God's love at Christmas time and enjoy his presence before the last week before Christmas slaps you in the face.

You might listen to God for what to do with his love. Maybe you need to accept it for yourself and trust in Jesus. Maybe God will prompt you with someone you need to love this Christmas time. Maybe it is someone hard. Family you have not seen in a while. Maybe it is a neighbor who needs an invitation to Jesus or CCC Christmas Eve. Maybe something else. But take a few moments now to listen to God and ask him directly – what do you want me to do with your love?