

God's 'Whoever'  
John 3:16  
Pastor Draeger May 4, 2008 10AM

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus, Amen.

Well, the text for today is "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 is the 6<sup>th</sup> week of this series, and the last day of it and we've got one word upon which we are going to focus. But as we do I'd like to just summarize where we've been. We started out with a message that said *God loves*, and then we said *God gave*, and the third was *we believe* and the fourth was *we live*. And in that fourth one (we had an introductory message the first Sunday that covered it all) last week we talked about the *we live* part. We talked about that as we come to faith in Jesus, we have life that is eternal. We don't have to wait to die to get it. And then we talked a bit about what it is like in heaven, and talking about there is no pain, there's no suffering, there's nothing negative about heaven -- it's all glory to be in the presence of Jesus. And because she was so excited to hear that message, Lilo James went to heaven on Tuesday. Well, it was good news for her, that there would be no pain. She was facing an 8 hour back surgery that she may or may not have survived; and they were wondering whether to do that or not. And you know heaven is a good place, and we say that heaven is our home -- we believe that.

But in between now and then *we live*, we live by faith, and we live life abundantly through that faith in Jesus Christ. And then there is this one very interesting word that shows up in the text, and it is the word 'Whoever.' Today, one of the most famous **W**-words you hear people say isn't *Whoever* but *whatever*. So they say "*whatever*," and do you hear the sarcasm in that tone? Most often it is filled with sarcasm - there isn't a whole lot of love in the word *whatever*. But you hear that word so often I thought "let's take a look at this word 'Whoever.'" I did a quick search of the New Testament, particularly the gospels, and I found that the word 'Whoever' shows up 45 times just in the gospels alone. And guess whose lips it is found on? Jesus. Jesus was talking about 'Whoever' and He talked about 'Whoever' a lot.

Let's just think about the word 'Whoever' for a moment. When you say 'Whoever' it's kind of like this. It's *Whoever!* Right? The sign for whatever is this, the sign for 'Whoever' is huge, it's big. It's God extending Himself in a welcoming way. Between services, little Parker Lee (who's about 14 months old) who has learned to walk, was at the back of the sanctuary. He was just standing there looking at me and I got down on one knee about 4 or 5 pews ahead of him, and I said, "Come on down Parker, come on." And finally he came down and as he got down to me he put his arms up so that I would pick him up. And that is to me the picture of 'Whoever' from God's point of view. That He wants us to come to Him. It's an inviting, welcoming gesture, and the word 'Whoever' is the word to describe that reality in God; that He talks about 'Whoever.' It's like the welcome mat on the doorstep of heaven, it doesn't just say welcome, it says 'Whoever.' Let's try that together, 'Whoever.' Say that with me, 'Whoever.' Do the sign language too, 'Whoever.' That's cool; doesn't that feel good to say 'Whoever'? Doesn't it

just sort of open you up when you do that? You can even breathe more deeply, and it's a good thing to say '*Whoever.*'

'*Whoever*' is powerful isn't it? Just even in this room when we say '*Whoever*' that way, it's a powerful thing - it does something to us. I'd like to suggest that '*Whoever*' is enormously powerful -- it's the sledge hammer that sledge hammers racial fences. It's the dynamite that blows up social classes. It's the thing that bypasses gender borders. It's the thing that eclipses ancient traditions- like it's always got to be done *this* way. '*Whoever*' makes it clear, absolutely unshakably clear, that God exports grace to the world. Jesus uses the word '*Whoever*' to explode commonly held boundaries among His Jewish contemporaries. Remember how the Jewish people thought that the message of Messiah was to be limited to the Jewish people? And what Jesus was always saying is, it's not about Jews only, but it is '***Whoever.***' And I want to give you some of those words of Jesus, I'm not going to give you all 45, but I'm going to give you maybe a third of them.

"*Whoever* acknowledges Me before men, I also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven."

"*Whoever* finds his life will lose it, *Whoever* loses his life for My sake will find it."

"*Whoever* does God's will is My brother, sister and mother."

"*Whoever* believes and is baptized will be saved, but *Whoever* does not believe will be condemned."

"*Whoever* believes in the Son has eternal life, but *Whoever* rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

"*Whoever* drinks the water I give him will never thirst."

"*Whoever* comes to Me, I will never drive away."

"*Whoever* lives and believes in Me, will never die."

"*Whoever* is thirsty let him come, and *Whoever* wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life," found in the last chapter in the last book of the bible, words of the ascended Lord.

And then to carry the theme forward, the apostle Paul writes in Titus, "The grace of God has appeared to *all* men." That's another way of saying to '*Whoever.*' Paul also writes that Christ Jesus sacrificed Himself to win freedom for *all mankind*, in other word for '*Whoever.*'

And then Peter, who thought it was all about just the Jews. Remember even in the book of Acts after the Pentecost experience, he still didn't get that God's love was for

'Whoever.' So he has this dream, this vision, that God would be willing to minister to the gentiles. In other words God's passion to reach 'Whoever.'

I'd like to pause on the word 'Whoever' and break it apart. The concepts behind 'Whoever' are things like this - There are no pre-conditions in 'Whoever.' 'Whoever' is all inclusive - it has the welcome mat out - *WHOEVER*.

And so Jesus tells the story when people had some narrow view of what it meant to be a follower of God, to know God. He tells this little story about a man who had two sons. You know the story. We call it the story of the *prodigal son*, and you know that I'd prefer to call it the story of the *waiting father*, because that's really what the point is about. It's the kingdom of heaven is like this, so it's a story about God's grace for people. So he says this is about God, it's not about the boy.

So he tells the story about the prodigal son who takes his inheritance from his dad, and he goes off and he squanders it by living high on the hog, and ends up feeding hogs because he had nothing left. But when he comes to his senses, he swallowed not only the pods that he'd been eating with the pigs, but he swallows his pride and decides to start a journey back home, thinking that dad's servants have it better than he does. When he comes home, the father is waiting and watching. He had one son at home who was obedient, doing all the right stuff, and yet he still had one more son who was missing in action. He kept waiting for him to return, and when he sees him come down the road he runs to him with his arms wide open, and the boy does the same because he knew of the father's love.

Wherever you are, *wherever* you are, unconditionally He accepts you. No conditions. He had no conditions for Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Remember the tax collector was hated by the Jews? And here Zacchaeus, who wanted to see Jesus, climbed a tree because he was too short to see through the crowd, and nobody would open this crowd up to him because they hated him anyway. He was taking money from Jews and giving to the Romans, and he was actually adding his own little retirement plan on top of it. Jesus looks at Zacchaeus and says, "Zacchaeus come down from that tree because I'm going to eat with you today. I'm going to associate Myself with you, I'm going to identify with you by having dinner at your house; no conditions."

And then there was the blind and the lepers, and Jesus would touch them and heal them; no conditions. Then there was the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter 4, where Jesus talks to her about being the water of life, and says, "*Whoever* drinks of this water will thirst again, but *Whoever* drinks of what I have will never be thirsty again." And she was the one who was an adulteress, and she was the one who was a Samaritan hated by Jews. No conditions.

There was a woman caught in adultery and the Pharisees put her in front of Jesus and asked, what do you say about her? And the death penalty was the normal penalty for adultery. And what did Jesus say to her? "Go and sin no more," after He told the guys, "He who is without sin among you, cast the first stone." No conditions.

Wealthy Pharisee Joseph of Arimathea, was one who also received the blessing of Jesus; wealthy Pharisee. So it wasn't just the impoverished, but even the well-to-do and the well-positioned. Because he was a Pharisee, he was well-positioned; he just happened to also loan Jesus a tomb for two nights. No conditions, *wherever, wherever* you might be.

I'd like to suggest that our God is this kind of God. That He will do this kind of '*Whoever*,' wherever, whenever - whenever there is need. Jesus tells the story of a whenever experience. Tells a parable about a landowner who hired migrant farm workers to come and work on his vineyard. So he went out to Home Depot and found a bunch of migrant workers there, and he hired them at 9 o'clock in the morning to go work in the fields. They weren't getting the job done so at noontime he goes out and hires some more. Then he goes back late in the afternoon and hires some more because the job still wasn't done. Then as Jesus tells the story about this guy, he says, "and then when it came quitting time he starts to pay the guys their wages. And the people who came last got the same as those who came first." It doesn't sound fair but it's what they had contracted for so it was fair. And Jesus is basically saying whenever you come, whether you come first or come late, *whenever, Whoever*.

I'd like to tell you a story about how whenever happened just this past Friday. Some of you know Paul Kruger and Soo-Yee Lim. Soo-Yee has been in Southern California a lot lately because her mom has been in and out of the hospital, in and out of a convalescent hospital as well. Most recently has been in the hospital and has been under hospice care. Soo-Yee was down this week visiting with her mom. Her mom, born in China, spent much of her life in Malaysia, that's where Soo-Yee was born and raised. Her mom did not know God. People throughout Redeemer family and throughout the country have been praying for Soo-Yee's mom. On Friday, Soo-Yee was with her mom and was talking to her about Jesus. On Friday, Mrs. Chow confessed Jesus as her Savior and Lord for the first time. On Friday, Soo-Yee got a hold of her aunt, who brought a pastor in, and Mrs. Chow was baptized; and Mrs. Chow and Soo-Yee received communion together that same day. Do you suppose heaven's rejoicing? I know a lot of people who are. Late in life, late in life, it's part of God's '*Whoever*' includes *whenever*.

This is that kind of unconditional love of our God. Our God is a '*Whoever*' God, He welcomes as we are. His unconditional love then changes our hearts and moves us to repent and to keep on turning back to Him. His love takes us *Whoever, however, whenever* and *wherever*. And then He simply says, now that I have you, I want to grow you, I want to change you, I want to mold you and shape to be who I want you to be. He molds us to live in a way that honors Him for time, and honors Him in eternity. He takes us exactly as we are, but He never leaves us that way. He continues to mold us into Christ's image. He clothes us with the righteousness of Jesus and He develops us so that we become what we look like to Him. He moves us to look more and more, day by day, like the righteousness that is ours by faith in baptism. This is God's '*Whoever*' policy. It never dismisses, He will never say to anyone, *whatever*, but His heart is always reaching out with '*Whoever*.'

And so those words are still applicable, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that **‘Whoever’** believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life.” I’d like us to try that together one more time, be careful of your neighbor though, don’t poke him in the eye with your finger. So let’s try that together, “for God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son so that **‘Whoever’** believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Aren’t you grateful that you are in that *‘Whoever?’* That you and I and others might live, that we are the representatives of *‘Whoever.’* And He always loves, and He always loves through the cross and an open tomb of His own Dear Son. God so loved the world that *‘Whoever,’* Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep and guard our hearts and minds as we live through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.