

Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”
“No Lone Ranger”
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Back in 1933 a radio western show became a hit— it was called “The Lone Ranger”. It became so popular that books were made based on the Lone Ranger character. When television came along after World War II, a TV show was made and ran from 1949 to 1957. The Lone Ranger is basically a story from way back in the old Western days when there was a need for justice with not many lawmen who were accessible. Let me give you a little quiz to see how much you know of The Lone Ranger. First, what was his horse’s name? (Silver) Second, what color was his horse? (White) Third, what was his friend’s name who accompanied him? (Tonto) The Lone Ranger made it to the movies in 2013 with big actors in it, like Johnny Depp and Helen Bonham Carter, but the movie bombed and got 30% in Rotten Tomatoes. The Lone Ranger was known for being mysterious— no one knew who he was. He pretty much rode alone through the West except for one sole companion— a Native American named Tonto. The Lone Ranger was a fictitious victor in temporal skirmishes he encountered. While this might be a good role model for law enforcement, it is not for everyday living in many ways. Sometimes people are tempted, consciously or not, to ride through their lives like the Lone Ranger— all by themselves, or nearly so, with plenty of mystery. E.g., I have seen couples eating out together, and no one is talking to each other! E.g., I have read of women who like to marry the dark, mysterious, not talkative men because they are attractive in what is unknown— only to find out later when they marry them that basically the men don’t say much because they really don’t have a great deal to say! We will see, however, in our passage today that while The Lone Ranger has his place in storytelling, if we follow Jesus there are going to be times when we realize we cannot be like this character.

READ John 16:25-33 (p. 111)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just addressed the disciples that in a little while they won't see Him, but then He encourages them with the news that in a little while they will see Him in the resurrection! He wants them to know that their mourning will be turned to joy in Him.

READ vv 25-30. "Jesus is unlike the Lone Ranger in at least three ways. First, the mystery of who Jesus really is has been revealed. Cf. Mark 4:33-34; 1 Peter 1:10-12." We all love a good mystery! Have you ever seen a mystery revealed? E.g., in the movie "The Shawshank Redemption" the main character Andy escapes from jail with very nice clothes and leaves with a lot of money, and additionally he notifies the police about the nefarious activities of the prison warden. We are left at the end puzzled— how did he do that? And the movie slowly goes over all the details of how he did this, and, even though it is not true, it is a great tale! But at times these mysteries revealed are true. E.g., I know of a man who was short, balding, had a straggly, beard, not too attractive face, and this man actually won the love of a beautiful woman and married her! How did this happen?! Well, it was explained to me that they worked in the same workplace, and he was funny and would show her a lot of attention and was kind, and he did his job well, and he pursued her but she was not interested; then one day he was transferred to another location for a while, and when he came back she realized something— she had missed him! Jesus Himself is somewhat of a mystery for the disciples. We see in Mark 4:33-34 He speaks to the crowds in mysterious parables; see also Matthew 13:16-17. We read in 1 Peter 1:10-12 that the prophets of old were revealing the gracious salvation of Jesus to come and they searched and searched for who this Person would be— even the angels longed to see this; READ. Jesus clearly reveals to the disciples who He is— He is from heaven where the Father is and He has come into this world, and He is leaving this world

and going back to heaven. The disciples see now more clearly who He really is—unlike the Lone Ranger!

READ vv 31-33a. “Second, unlike the Lone Ranger, Jesus is not lone/alone, and neither are His followers. Cf. Joshua 1:9; 1 Kings 19:11-18; Philippians 4:4-7.” A major theme in the Old Testament of the relationship between God and His people is that He is with them. This is prominent in God’s sending Joshua to take over for Moses and lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. In Joshua 1:9 we read that God says to Joshua, “I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go”. Jesus knew this about God, so He was prepared for the disciples abandoning Him in His time of need. Sometimes God calls us to follow Him even though no one else will go— and God proves His presence and blessing and peace as we go it alone. E.g., I recall in college I felt God had called me to go on a summer evangelism project to Aspen, Colorado with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and I talked to others in our InterVarsity group about the trip, and no one could go— except for one friend. So he and I made plans to save some money and drive there, and it would be great! But about a month before the trip my friend pulled out, and I was left alone on the trip? Should I still go? I felt the Lord still wanted me to go, so I got on a plane, flying by myself for the first time, going to a place I had never been before, and knowing no one there once I got to my destination. But the Lord was with me the entire time, and I had a wonderful time on this evangelism project, which taught me things I still do today in sharing the gospel. E.g., I am reminded of Kaylor also— here she is going on a mission outreach project this week, and none of her friends were able to come, and she knows no one, but she is willing to serve the Lord and trust in Him to provide for her! Jesus promises God’s peace despite persecution, which reminds of Philippians 4:4-7, where Paul was in prison but can find the peace that from the Lord that guards his heart and mind. And God promises us

His peace through the Body of Christ— just when we think we are all alone, the Lord, we find out, has already raised up believers to stand with us. In 1 Kings 19:11-18 we find Elijah, after defeating the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and have them put to death, finds Queen Jezebel seeking his life, so Elijah hides in a cave, and there God asks him why he is hiding, and Elijah emphasizes that he alone is following the Lord, but God lets him know 7,000 Israelites have not bent the knee to Baal. Unlike the Lone Ranger, we are not alone!

READ v 33b. “Third, unlike the Lone Ranger, Jesus’ victory is not local and is not fictional, but is real and universal, and yet comes at tremendous cost. Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:50-57.” Jesus in our passage encourages His followers that they will face persecution, but to take courage— he has conquered the world! The verb for “conquered” comes from the word with which we are all familiar-- Nike. The verb in the original language is νικάω. I.e., Jesus is the original nike! E.g., it amazes me that there are scholars who try to say Christianity is not true and that Jesus did not rise from the dead, but they can offer no clear explanation for one thing— how did the church get started? Also, why would Paul, who was clearly a sober, right-minded man, believe so strongly in the resurrection if it did not happen? Christians today are still persecuted, but they have courage because they serve Jesus the Victor! E.g., in the recent *Voice of the Martyrs* magazine (June, 2021) there is a story of Kande and Bindi, a Christian couple with two daughters who ministered in India; they faced much opposition from radical Hindus there, and were asked to participate in ceremonies honoring Hindu gods, and they refused; one night armed men broke down the door to their house and took Kande away and killed him. Later Bindi’s Dad suggested that maybe she should stop following Jesus: “But in reply to her father, Bindi repeated something she remembered Kande once saying: ‘I will live for Jesus or die for Jesus,’ she said, ‘but I will never turn back’” (p. 5). Through this time Bindi shares that she has

learned more about God's faithfulness and purposes. Unlike the Lone Ranger, Jesus is real, and His victory is total!

“Are we more like the Lone Ranger or Jesus?” Are we more into the mysteries of life or into the truth revealed? Are we all alone in our following Christ or are we tied to a body of believers? Are we harboring doubt in our minds and hearts about Christianity or are we acting on the truth of its message for the world?