

## INTRODUCTION

This is the final message in the series, "The Gospel According to the Beatles." Next Sunday I will begin a verse-by-verse study of the Gospel According to John—that's the Apostle John, not John Lennon.

Today I want to talk about the Beatles' song "Eleanor Rigby," which was released in 1966. There are several interesting trivia facts about this song. First, the Beatles never performed Eleanor Rigby publicly, because by the time it was released, they had stopped touring.

Second, it was the first recording where none of the Beatles played instruments. The music was provided by an octet of violins, violas, and cellos.

Third, Eleanor Rigby was released as the B-side of a single record. Now for all of you born after 1970, let me explain records to you. When I was a teenager, we had these small records called "singles" that were played on record players at 45 rpm. Singles usually had an A side—the big hit; and a B-side, often called the flip side, which was not expected to be such a big hit. The single containing Eleanor Rigby had Yellow Submarine as the A side but although Yellow Submarine was a happy song written for children, Eleanor Rigby became the much larger hit.

So, let's look the story behind the song. Paul wrote most of it, and here's how he remembers it:

"I was sitting at the piano when I thought of it. The first few bars just came to me, and I got this name in my head... 'Daisy Hawkins picks up the rice in the church'. I don't know why. I couldn't think of much more so I put it away for a day.

Then the name 'Father McCartney' came to me, and all the lonely people. But I thought that people would think it was supposed to be about my Dad sitting knitting his socks. Dad's a happy lad. So I went through the telephone book and I got the name 'McKenzie.'

I got the name Rigby from a shop in Bristol. I was wandering round Bristol one day and saw a shop called Rigby. And I think Eleanor was from Eleanor Bron, the actress we worked with in the film 'Help!' But I just liked the name. I was looking for a name that sounded natural. Eleanor Rigby sounded natural."

There is a tombstone in a cemetery near where Paul lived that contains the name "Eleanor Rigby" but Paul claims he didn't use that as the source of the song. But that tombstone is a favorite photo spot of Beatles fans visiting Liverpool.

One final bit of trivia: Eleanor Rigby was the first song that the Beatles wrote in the third person. It doesn't contain the pronouns I, me, my, or you. It's the story of two lonely people brought together by fate.

It's a powerful song about loneliness. There's a lonely woman named Eleanor Rigby who picks up the rice from a wedding. Maybe she worked at the church as a cleaning lady. Nobody really

knew her because she kept her face in a jar by the door. Most of us are the same way, we have a face we wear at home and another face we wear when we leave the house. Father McKenzie is a lonely catholic priest. His religion has forbidden him to marry; he writes as sermon, but nobody came to hear it. But at her death these two lonely characters come together.

Eleanor Rigby has become the matron saint for lonely people. If you visit Liverpool you can see the statue of Eleanor Rigby sitting on a bench. She is faceless. Here bag on one side and a bird on the other side has been placed there intentionally, so you still cannot get close to Eleanor Rigby.

The Beatles touched a sensitive nerve by confronting loneliness. It is one of the most painful human conditions. God looked down at Adam in the Garden of Eden and declared, "It is not good for man to be alone." That's still true. There are many examples of lonely people in the Bible. In this message let's look at the life of Job. God allowed Satan to test Job and soon Job found his life in a mess. Three so-called friends came to comfort Job, but they weren't much help, they just implied that Job must have done something awful to end up in such a painful situation.

Job was miserable, and in Job 19:13-19 (CSB) he describes his loneliness: "He has removed my brothers from me; my acquaintances have abandoned me. My relatives stop coming by, and my close friends have forgotten me. My houseguests and female servants regard me as a stranger; I am a foreigner in their sight. I call for my servant, but he does not answer, even if I beg him with my own mouth. My breath is offensive to my wife, and my own family finds me repulsive. Even young boys scorn me. When I stand up, they mock me. All of my best friends despise me, and those I love have turned against me."

Job wasn't alone; he was surrounded by people, yet his heart cried out with a sense of loneliness. You don't have to be alone to suffer from loneliness. Someone has said that a city is a place where people are lonely together.

The Beatles' song asks two questions about loneliness that they never answer: Look at all the lonely people: Where do they all come from? Easy answer: They come from everywhere—every neighborhood, every city, and every nation. The second question was "Lonely people, where do they all belong? And I'll answer that question in this message. I want to share three Biblical truths that will help you to understand how you can overcome loneliness.

## **I. DON'T CONFUSE LONELINESS WITH SOLITUDE.**

When we look at the earthly ministry of Jesus we see He often sought solitude. The Bible says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying." (Mark 1:35 CSB) And we know from other passages that this wasn't just a one-time escape, it was His custom. Luke tells us, "He often withdrew to deserted places and prayed." (Luke 5:16 CSB)

Crowds followed Jesus everywhere He went seeking a miracle. And Jesus shows us the value of getting away from the noisy crowd to enjoy peace and solitude. Maintained a healthy balance of spending time with people and His disciples and getting alone to spend time with His Heavenly Father. In the same way, each one of us should find a place of solitude each day where we can get alone with God and read His Word and talk to Him in prayer.

My dad was a forester who was always at home in the woods. We always cut our own firewood. Nobody had gas fireplaces back then. He taught me an important lesson about how to sharpen the points on the chain before you start cutting. It would take a few minutes of carefully file down each blade. I can remember him saying, "You're never wasting time when you stop to sharpen the saw." That's a great lesson that has carried over into my devotional life. Most of us could spend all our time around people, but each of us needs to follow the example of Jesus and find solitude to sharpen the saw.

## **II. JESUS UNDERSTANDS YOUR LONELINESS.**

Jesus experienced loneliness just as we do. Isaiah wrote, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him." (Isaiah 53:3 CSB) Jesus was the Messiah who fulfilled that prophecy; He was acquainted with suffering and grief. He knew what it was to be rejected. Jesus was basically a homeless man. In Matthew 8 we read: Jesus told him, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20 CSB)

Jesus understood loneliness. To me, the saddest line in Eleanor Rigby says, "Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name. Nobody came." You may think that's not possible. But in over forty years of being a pastor I can vividly recall the three times when I was asked to officiate at a graveside funeral where nobody showed up- not a family member, a friend, or a neighbor. I was the only person there beside someone from the funeral home and the gravediggers. How could that happen? Some people live sad lonely lives like Eleanor Rigby.

Jesus can relate to that kind of loneliness. Jesus had large crowds following Him early in His ministry. But when He started laying down the cost of discipleship, the crowds bailed on Him. Then among His inner twelve, one betrayed Him and another one denied Him three times. And when they came to arrest Jesus, they all abandoned Him. Jesus basically died alone. Not only did Jesus die with a sense of human loneliness, but also on the cross, He experienced alienation from His Father. He and His Father had been eternally co-existent and co-eternal. But in that moment that Jesus became sin for me and you, the gaze of a Holy God, who cannot look on sin, had to turn away. It was at that moment of utter loneliness that Jesus cried, "Eloi, Eloi lamma sabacthani" or "MY God, my God WHY have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46 CSB)

## **III. GOD CAN CURE YOUR LONELINESS.**

Job expressed his utter loneliness, but thank God, those weren't his last words. In the same chapter, Job's despair turns to faith. Job said, "But I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the

end he will stand on the dust. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet I will see God in my flesh. I will see him myself; my eyes will look at him, and not as a stranger. (Job 19:25-27 CSB)

Job looked into the future and made a prophecy of praise. He said I know that my Redeemer lives and that I will see Him someday. And when I see Him, we won't be like strangers!

You don't have to be an Eleanor Rigby today. God doesn't want you to suffer from loneliness. There are two parts of God's cure for loneliness.

### **A. God welcomes you into His forever family.**

Today, God's family is called the Church. Here's the promise from Psalm 68. "His name is the Lord. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families." (Psalm 68:4-6 NIV)

Loneliness is an epidemic in America. Dr. Jim Denison recently reported some recent findings from a survey about loneliness. 50% of Americans expressed that they often feel lonely or left out. Interestingly, the study showed that the older you are, the less lonely you are. Those aged 72 or older scored 38.7% on the loneliness scale. But those in Generation Z people who were born after 1995 (mostly this includes kids from 8 to 20) scored ten points higher on the loneliness scale at 48.4. And according to Dr. Denison, the loneliness scale of people of all ages who are active in a church was much lower than those who don't participate regularly in religious worship.

I think part of the problem is that most teenagers and Gen Zer's are primarily connected through social media platforms. As we become more connected through digital devices, we become less connected to flesh and blood people. You may have a thousand virtual friends, and not have one flesh-and-blood friend.

I saw a cartoon recently of four young people out together. The top panel was before smartphones. One guy observed, "How old is Barbara Streisand?" The gal next to him says, "I think she's 71." The third guy says, "Really? Wow!" The fourth guy asks, "Who's Barbra Streisand?" In the bottom panel after smartphones all four of them are just on the phones and nobody is talking. Cyber addiction has created a huge problem with loneliness in our nation.

Being in a loving church is one of God's cures for loneliness. The church isn't perfect, but there are people in every church who will say, "Welcome to every stranger who arrives." The church is not a building it's a family.

Church is SO much more than hearing music and a message. If you are part of our television audience and you are not physically able to attend worship, I want to say, "God bless you, we are honored to be able to bring this message to you." But if you are physically able to attend a church and you are watching me on television this morning, I want to say that you are missing out on the greatest thing God can offer you—that is the friendship, fellowship, and kindness

that you will find from real people in real congregations. If you are lonely, God wants to put you in a family called a church.

## **B. God promises His unfailing love.**

God wants to cure your loneliness by giving you flesh and blood friends, but He also wants to assure you of His love for you. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39 CSB)

If you know the Lord, you will never be alone. Nothing can separate you from His love. God knows you and He loves you. The Bible says God has your name engraved on the palm of His hands. Jesus said that the very hairs of your head are numbered. If you're bald that means that every pore where a hair follicle used to be is known to God.

A little girl was being taught to pray the Model Prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name..." She got a little confused and prayed these words, "Our Father who art in Heaven, how do you know my name?" The Creator of the Universe knows your name and He wants to be your friend. One of my all-time favorite songs is, "What a friend we have in Jesus." It asks, "Can we find a friend so helpful? Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer."

The Bible says there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Jesus is that friend. One day Jesus was dying on a cross and He saw a lonely thief dying with Him. The lonely man said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus said, "You don't have to be lonely anymore. Today you will be with me in paradise."

All the lonely people, where do they all belong? They belong in a church with people who will love them. They belong to a God who will love them with an everlasting love!

## **CONCLUSION**

So were the Beatles successful? It depends on your definition of success. By this world's standard the Beatles had it all. They had fame and wealth. They were paid \$10,000 to sing their first four songs on the Ed Sullivan show. Since then, they and their heirs have made hundreds of millions of dollars. George and John are both dead. Meanwhile, the queen has knighted both Sir Paul and Sir Ringo; Ringo received his knighthood just six weeks ago. The combined net worth of Ringo and Paul exceeds \$1 billion.

But Paul and Ringo and anyone else can devote an entire lifetime to accumulating wealth and fame, but without Jesus it means nothing. You can't take any of that with you.

You may recognize the name Jon Ortberg. He's a gifted writer and currently serves as pastor of Menlo Church a Presbyterian church in Menlo Park, California. Jon loves to tell the story of

playing monopoly with his grandmother when they were growing up. She had a vicious game and she always wiped him out. At the end of the game, she owned everything and Jon was flat broke. It was the same way every time they played and Jon was getting tired of losing.

Jon said that one summer a new kid moved in next door who was older and smarter than him and he was a Monopoly whiz kid. He taught Jon how to play and Jon practiced every day.

Finally it was time to face his grandmother. When he arrived she gave him a big hug and a kiss and Jon said, "Grandma, how about a game of Monopoly?" She said, "Sure." Jon was ready for her this time. By the end of the game he owned everything and had beaten his grandma for the first time. He was jumping up and shouting for joy. His grandmother smiled and said, "Jon, congratulations. Now that you know how to play monopoly let me teach you a lesson about life. It all goes back in the box." Jon said, "What do you mean? This is the greatest day of my life!" She said, "No, every property you bought, and every dollar you accumulated—it all goes back in the box."

Then she said, "Jon, always remember. When your game of life is over, the only thing you get to keep is you soul, and if you've lost that, you've lost everything." That's a great parable of life. Say that with me: IT ALL GOES BACK IN THE BOX.

I'm praying that Paul and Ringo will come to place their faith in Jesus Christ. But I don't have access to them. So what about you? If you died today, do you know that you would spend eternity with Jesus in heaven?

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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