Thoughts on Halloween

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0:00] Yesterday was the 31st of October. A day marked on many calendars is Halloween.! And many people in our society today do something out of the usual to mark the day.

I'm not going to go too much into the origins of Halloween, because trying to figure that out is kind of like when something falls out of the boat into a muddy lake. You can spend a lot of time digging around, and it's hard to be sure of anything that you come up with.
We do know with clarity, though, that the name Halloween is an older name for All Hallows' Eve.
And All Hallows' Eve is the day before All Hallows' Day, November 1st, or All Saints' Day.
Even All Saints' Day has murky origins. One theory is that as Christians were martyred in the first few centuries after the early church, the church began to remember the anniversaries of these martyrs' deaths.
But then eventually the number of days on the calendar on which somebody had died began to be so many that a single day was chosen to remember all who had been martyred for their faith in Christ.
[1:24] But then over the centuries and in different places and different church denominations, these remembrances were kept in different ways. Eventually other saints were added in, including those who hadn't been martyred.

And then Roman Catholic theology influenced things. They had a tendency, as many of you know, to venerate saints.
And then the day before All Hallows' Day, All Hallows' Eve, became a night to hold vigil and pray for the release of dead saints from purgatory.
The dates for some of these remembrances were moved around, perhaps in Ireland, in an effort to cover up Samhain, the pagan festival of the Celts.
And then there's even added confusion on top of all that of what the Reformation did and how it changed these remembrances. In Germany, October 31st is actually Reformation Day.
[2:29] In England, the Reformation that took place there saw some Christians object to observing All Saints' Day because of all that emphasis on purgatory, which they simply couldn't find in the Bible.

And then, of course, we add into all that, there's plenty of debate and discussion over how much pagan festivals and rituals have influenced things. Whatever the exact origins, our North American culture has deeply embraced Halloween.
And in the minds of the average Canadian, it no longer has anything to do with Christianity or martyrs or saints. It's become a day to celebrate the darkness, to think about supernatural things, to think about things which cause fear, things that are evil, whether fictional or real.
It's a day where people delight to think about witches and zombies and ghosts and spirits and vampires. For some, it's a day to celebrate violent fantasies.
Why is it that people delight in setting up gory and bloody scenes on the front lawn with dismembered body parts or to dress up with nasty, bloody scars all over their, painted on their faces or blood all over their clothes?
[4:11] And Hollywood doesn't help it, it just keeps pushing it more and more in that direction, releasing horror movies and supernatural thrillers in time for the big day.

Whatever its origins were, Halloween has become a celebration of evil, a celebration of darkness and fear. Now, I know that not everybody goes to that extreme.
Some really do see it as little more than a time for kids to dress up and go get candy from the neighbors. And maybe they even cringe at the grotesque and disturbing decorations that they see at people's houses which frighten their children and give them nightmares.

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Personally, I'll just be honest with you, I hate Halloween. I find it disturbing. It's a reminder to me that on the whole, as human beings, there's something dark and sinister deep inside of us.
There's a fascination with evil and even a love of evil. And as Christians who believe in the word of God, we're told by God to hate what is evil and to love what is good.
[5:28] God said those very words through the prophet Amos long ago. Hate evil. Love good. And so I think it's normal for us to feel a little bit melancholy inside when Halloween rolls around every year.

Not because we're insecure in our faith or our convictions, but because we're surrounded by the obvious opposite of what God says that we should be.
We're surrounded by visible displays of love for what is dark and evil while we're called to hate what is evil. And here's the kicker.
We're called to hate what is evil, but to love the people who celebrate evil. That's where it starts to get emotionally confusing.
I mean, people are lost in sin just as we all once were. They need the mercy and grace of Jesus just like we do. And were it not for the grace of God, we would be right along there with them celebrating the darkness with them.
[6:42] And so I think it's normal for us to feel melancholy inside, all mixed up in our emotions at Halloween because of the darkness that we see so obviously cherished and celebrated.

A darkness that we are called to hate and yet people we are called to love. Evil we are called to come out from and be separate from and yet sinners like us who we are called to love and reach out to with kindness and compassion.
It makes me wonder, is that melancholy feeling that we experience on Halloween maybe even just a small glimpse of what Jesus felt all the time as he walked this earth holy and perfect yet surrounded by sinners with opposite loves and opposite hates to his.
What was it like for the spotless sinless son of God to live among us and be face to face with us while we are so deeply selfish and proud and bent away from the truth and filled with impure thoughts and unholy desires.
and yet Jesus seeing us as we were did not hide away from us in heaven. He did not leave us to perish.
[8:17] He moved towards us in love. These are some of my favorite words in the scriptures from the apostle Paul Romans 5.8 6.8 you see at just the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die but God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us.
That's amazing isn't it? God didn't wait for us to become good to have a relationship with us. He knew that wasn't going to happen.
We could never become good apart from his rescuing work in our lives and yet he loved us still and he sent Christ to die for us while we were still actively loving the darkness.
Amazing. Well there's another thing that goes through my mind at Halloween. As I think about all the darkness and ugliness of Halloween I'm reminded that some of the things people put on their front lawns are real.
[9:50] Some of the things people love to think about and watch movies about are real. There are spirits both good and evil.

We talked about this last night with some of the kids who came by. Our culture's portrayal of the spirits and ghosts is totally inaccurate but spirits are real.
God's word tells us of angels and demons spirit beings who were created by God all of them were good when first made by God.
They were created to worship God. They were created to be his servants and to carry out his will to bring his words and messages to people and to witness his mighty acts from the creation of the world until now.
The Bible also tells us that some of the angels rebelled. They became corrupt just like we did. The chief of those corrupt and rebellious angels the Bible tells us is the devil Satan.
[11:12] Yes the devil is real. He is the one who tempted Eve in the garden long ago when we first fell into sin.

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He is the one who came before God asking permission to afflict Job with tragedy and pain. He is the one who tempted Jesus in the wilderness after his baptism.
The devil is the one who entered Judas as Judas acted out his plan to betray Jesus. And the devil is the one who will make his last stand against God at the end.
The devil hates us and his desire is to destroy all who belong to God. The apostle Peter warns us about the devil in 1 Peter 5 verse 8 and 9.
He says this, be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.
[12:22] Resist him, standing firm in the faith because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

yes, the devil is real. And we are to stand firm. We are to resist him.
In the Bible, we also read about lesser evil spirits or fallen angels. Eliphaz, the friend of Job, tells us about his encounter with one of them.
This is in Job 4, verse 12. Eliphaz is speaking to Job. He says, a word was secretly brought to me. My ears caught a whisper of it.
Amid disquieting dreams in the night when deep sleep falls on people, fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face and the hair on my body stood on end.
[13:33] It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes and I heard a hushed voice. Can a mortal be more righteous than God?

Can even a strong man be more pure than his maker? father. If God places no trust in his servants, if he charges his angels with error, how much more are those who live in houses of clay?
So this spirit gave Eliphaz words to say to Job, which on the surface seem true, but about Job's situation are completely wrong.
wrongdoing. This spirit gave Eliphaz words with which to accuse Job of wrongdoing, even though we know from before, from God's own mouth, that Job hadn't done anything wrong.
This is just one of many glimpses that we get in the Bible of what the evil spirits are up to in our world. We see them putting lies into the mouths of false prophets.
[14:45] We see them possessing people and controlling people. We see them causing people to harm themselves and injuring people.

Yes, spirits are real, and they are on the prowl. But what else do we see? We see that God has unrivaled power and authority over the evil spirits.
and that they can do nothing without his permission. We see Jesus come face to face with numerous evil spirits and the spirits cower before him, terrified for their lives.
We see Jesus force them out of people, giving orders to them to come out and to leave people alone. and even though they are evil and disobedient, they obey, terrified of what Jesus will do to them if they refuse.
We hear Jesus tell us that at the end, there is an eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. will not get away with the things that they have done, the wicked things they have done.
[16:16] God will punish them. At the very end of the Bible, God gives us a glimpse of what will be as the devil makes his last vein stand against God.

Revelation chapter 20 verse 7. When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth and to gather them for battle.
In number, they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.
And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
That was the vision that God gave the apostle John about what's coming for Satan and his fallen angels. Eternal fire. Everlasting torment.
[17:27] the punishment for all the wicked things that they have done. Yes, spirits are real. The devil is real.

They even have a measure of power. But none of them can rival God or his son. They cannot lay a finger on us without God's permission.

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And if we belong to God, we can stand firm without fear. When God brings everything to its final end, as we just read, those evil spirits, those rebellious angels will meet their end.
The eternal fire, never to be seen by us again. They are no match for God. If we belong to God, we are secure.
we are safe. I love these words of Jesus in John chapter 10. He says, my sheep listen to my voice.
[18:37] I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.

my father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. These words are precious, aren't they?
they're not but it gets us thinking. Are you one of Jesus' sheep? Do you belong to him?
Are you following him? Do you know him? This promise is for his sheep. Well, there's one more place that I'd like to stop and reflect this morning and it's at the cross.
cross. Most of you know the story very well about how Jesus suffered and died for us on the cross. Most of you know why he did that.
[19:46] It was to make atonement for our sins so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God. But there's another reason, another thing God accomplished at the cross for us.

Whether we knew it or not as guilty sinners, we were under the influence and power and authority of the devil. Listen to these words from Hebrews chapter 2 verse 14.
Since the children have flesh and blood, he too, that's Jesus, shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.
Whether we know it or not or felt it or not, apart from Christ, we are under the power of the devil. The author of Hebrews says that Jesus, by his death, broke the power of the devil over us, setting us free.
We read a similar sort of thing in Paul's letter to the Colossians. We read there in chapter 1 verse 13 about how God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves.
[21:24] And how did God do that? Well, we read a little bit later on in Colossians chapter 2 verse 13. He says, when you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

He forgave us all our sins having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us. He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.
So at the cross as Jesus bled and died for us, God not only forgave our sins but he disarmed the powers and authorities. Paul's not talking about earthly authorities.
here but those in the spiritual realm. In some way that we really don't understand, our sin and our guilt put us on the side of the devil and his angels.
Our failing to keep God's commandments gave the devil leverage, power over us to make accusations against us demanding our death.
[22:52] And our punishment. But Christ, by his death, took that away. He got rid of the charge against us.

It no longer sticks to us because the punishment that we deserve was served. Christ took it upon himself, which means that we are now free.
no accusation can be made. The powers are disarmed. There's no leverage left for Satan to make that accusation against us.
And so as we take a few moments now to eat the bread and to drink the cup, let's remember the price of our freedom. let's remember what Jesus did to get us out of the kingdom of darkness and into his kingdom of light.
His blood was poured out of his body. His body was broken. He was killed. That was the price for our freedom.
[24:05] God, let's take these next moments to reflect and to pray, to talk to the Lord Jesus. Once we've had a few minutes to do that, the elders will come and pass out the bread and the cup.

And if you have repented of your sins and believe in Jesus, if you belong to him, then join with us in this remembrance. And if you have not, please just let the bread and the cup pass you by.

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Once you've received the elements, hold on to them until everybody who wishes to partake has been served. And then we'll give thanks together and we'll eat and drink all together.

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