

We started looking on 21 September at the question: "What is the Gospel?" We identified six points. These are:

- God is our holy creator and righteous judge;
- Sin separates us from God;
- God sent Jesus to die for us;
- Christ's death and resurrection - the bridge to end our separation from God;
- We are to respond and repent if we are to be saved; and
- Our lives are to reflect that we follow Christ.

On the 28th of September we looked at "God is our Holy Creator and Righteous Judge". On 5 at "Spreading the Gospel", on 12 October at "We have all sinned separating us from God" Yesterday elder Pierre Fourie shared a message on the topic "For God so loved the world ... that he sent Jesus". Pierre's notes are attached in case you were not there yesterday or would like to refer to this important message again.

This coming Sunday Pierre will take this message further as he shares on the topic of "Christ's death and resurrection - the bridge to end our separation from God".

God bless,

Gordon Hay

Session Clerk – Monday 20 October 2014

### **Sermon-For God so loved the world...that he sent Jesus**

**Readings: [Isaiah 53:1-12](#) and [Philippians 2:5-11](#)**

19 October 2014

#### 1. Introduction

If I was to ask anyone of you today, what has 4 equal sides and 90 degree angles, I

am pretty sure you will tell me it's a square. If however, in my description of the square, I was to get one of the defining features wrong I would no longer be describing a square, regardless of culture, time, or place.

Similarly, if a believer were to summarize the gospel, we might reasonably anticipate that each explanation would conform to a particular shape that transcends different communication styles, theological influences, and cultural idioms. For example in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, he provides a particular shape to the gospel of (1 Cor. 15:3–4) by forming it around the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. But so often we believers get the "shape" of the Gospel wrong especially when we ignore the storyline of scripture.

I don't think any of us here would dream of describing a square as having three sides of differing lengths with three angles. It simply just would not be a square. Yet so often at the stroke of a pen, in order to make the Gospel more palatable, we remove one or two of the angles of the Gospel, change the description of its framework and still call it the Gospel. We need to be careful. We will see shortly how we actually dishonour God when we do this.

So it is within this context that we share a series of six sermons that help shape the Gospel for us according to the story line of the bible. It is this Good News story, the Gospel that ultimately points us to Jesus Christ.

Let's do a quick and short recap of the last two sermons.

In RC Sproul's Magazine, Table Talk a writer puts part of what we have heard in the last sermons very succinctly. He says "because God is Holy, He is separated from all sin and utterly opposed to every sinner. Hence we who are born of sin are by definition separated from Him. There is a great divide because sin and Holiness are not compatible. Because God is love, He delights in purity and must, of necessity, hate all that is unholy. In His judgement he has found us all guilty of sin. Because God is righteous, He must punish the sin that violates His holiness". [1]

It is only once we understand God's Holiness that we can truly understand his wrath

against sin. As A.W. Pink says, "The wrath of God is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin."

This leads us to where we start with today's sermon. It is within this activity, His holiness stirred into activity against sin that God sends Jesus into the world to die for us. Jesus comes to our world and takes God's wrath on the cross so that sin no longer separates us from God: there is no divide anymore but a bridge that connects us with God through Jesus. So let's turn to the topic of today—"God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to die for us". Note that the second half of that sentence, that we are all familiar with, namely "that who so ever believes in Him shall have everlasting life" forms part of next week's sermon.

The emphasis of today's sermon is to contrast the world we live in with God's love for us. It is to contrast our fallen world and its separation from God, with the immense love of Jesus, who was separated from God on the cross. It is to contrast our fallen state of apathy with the directed, willed work of our Father to send Jesus to come and find His stray sheep. It is to highlight the immense, deep spiritual pain of the alienation of Christ from God on the cross as God brought His wrath to bear on His Son so that we might have everlasting life.

2. For God so loved the world that He sent Jesus

a. The World

Let's examine this world that God so loved.

- It is a fallen world characterised by enmity to God. This is reflected in our Old Testament reading of today namely, Isaiah 53 verse 3 where it says "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem."

Let's look at this enmity. Imagine a scene with a little kitten sitting scared to death on a stone in the middle of a creek. Nobody

knows how it got there, but it was obviously thrown into the river by someone. We notice that along the riverside there are a bunch of young guys trying to get to him. As they try to get him we almost instinctively know what the cat will do. He sees himself at war with anybody who tries to get to him. In his mind he can just imagine them trying to get to get hold of him and drowning him- so he bites and scratches as they approach him. Fortunately he is small enough and one kid decides that he will pick up the cat and that he will just take all the cuts, take all the scratches and little tooth marks So he takes the cat that is screaming, kicking and trying to fight him yet he is the very person who was actually trying to save him [2]. Isn't this exactly what happens when God sends Jesus to save us? That is the picture that the bible gives of all of our relationships to God in our natural state. We are born at enmity with God. Romans Ch 8: verse 7 says, "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

- It is not only a world characterised by Enmity to God but also by Idolatry. Our world refuses to glorify God in an appropriate and proper way. Paul in his penetrating description of human fallenness in Romans 1 verse 21 it says "They did not honour Him as God". So often when we talk about God, we describe Him in such a way that He isn't recognisable as the God of the Bible. If we don't acknowledge the sovereignty of God, if we don't acknowledge the justice of God, if we don't acknowledge the omniscience of God, the immutability of God, then whatever god it is that we are acknowledging, it is not God. We're not glorifying God as God, we're glorifying something less than God as if it was God, and to glorify something other than God or something less than God as if it were God is the very essence of idolatry[3]. The refusal to glorify God in an appropriate and proper way is basic to

our corrupt state.

Idolatry is our most basic sin, and in it an exchange is made: God reveals His truth about Himself, and we trade in that truth and walk out with the lie. We exchange the glory of God for the glory of the creature. This can be done in a crass way of worshipping something that we craft with our own hands such as a statue or an icon. But there is also a more sophisticated, intellectual sort of idolatry—the reconstruction of our doctrine of God in such a way as to strip Him of those attributes with which we are uncomfortable. All of us have a propensity to reconstruct a god who is not holy, who is not wrathful, who is not just and who is not sovereign. We find it easy to take the attributes of God we like and reject the ones we don't. When we do that, we are as guilty of idolatry as a person who is worshipping a graven image.[4]

- It is not only a world characterised by Enmity to God and Idolatry. It is a world of self reliance, self sufficiency or arrogance. It is a world that ignores Gods Sovereignty and His Creation. Let me explain this by way of an analogy. Say I gave you a rose bud and told you to open it without tearing off any petals. I am sure all of us would proceed carefully in order to unfold the rose while trying to keep every petal intact. But as most of you that have tried to do it will know, it is impossible to do so. This bud is a design of God and our clumsy hands can't unfold the petals. However God opens the flower so beautifully, yet when in our hands the petals fade and die. And so it is that if I cannot unfold the flower of God's design then how can I think I have the wisdom, the self reliance, the self control and arrogance to unfold my own life, designed by God. [5]

In essence we cut God out and have no place for Him in our lives-

we show in our actions that we believe we know better-we snub Him and then we try to control the un-folding of the moments of our life as if we are god. We rely on our own abilities. It's our EGO, where we simple Edge God Out.

We could carry on with many other characteristics of this world of ours. But suffice to say that God loves THIS world-a world gone astray and rebellious-dead in its trespasses and sin-but **this is** the world God has loved.

b. God **so** loved the world

Why would John the apostle say God so loved the world? Why the word "so". Surely it has to do with how radically out of sync the world is with God. The people of this world do not want to glorify God in their fallen state but wants to glorify themselves; they want to kick and fight back when trying to be saved and would like to be in control of their own lives. It is a world that simply has no place for God in their fallen lives. It's all about self-centredness. Yet God still sent His Son to this very world. That is such amazing love to come to your flagrant enemies.

Now we all know that the heart is the very essence or core of our commitment to the things we do in life. The Word teaches that the heart is the control centre for life. A person's life is a reflection of his heart. It is these hearts that commit themselves to the dysfunctional characteristics of the world, both in the times of Christ and today-so what would it take for our mistrusting hearts that are in denial of God to be shocked into a whole new way of living and being?

It is love-love so radical-radical unconditional love in the form of Jesus. We do not know how radical Jesus love was if do not know how separated Jesus was from God when He died on the cross. We do not know how much Jesus loved us if we do not know how much he suffered. How do we begin to grasp the

size of God's love?

Imagine that a friend of yours comes to see you and says hey, I was at your house the other day and a bill came due and you were not at home, so I paid it. When you find this out you do not know actually know how to respond. If it is a small bill then you just need to say thank you. If SARS has finally caught up with you for ten years of tax you might fall down on the ground and kiss his feet. Until you know how much the friend paid you don't know how to respond. And so it that we do not know how much Jesus loved us if we don't know how much he suffered for us.[6]

Let's see how much this suffering was. In our Old Testament reading today from Isaiah Ch. 53 verse 10 we read "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for he will see his offspring and prolong his days". Does it not make you gasp? This is the backdrop to the following thoughts. God sent Jesus to be crushed and to suffer. It's part of God's plan.

To understand this and how radical Jesus' love for us is let's first turn to Paul's words in the passage of Philippians that we read today. This passage does not just give us the picture of Jesus the son of God but also gives us the picture of Jesus as a human being.

Jesus as a human being is the second Adam. He accomplishes what the first Adam failed to do. Jesus puts into reverse Adam and Eve's wilful choice to destroy humanity. To reverse what Adam and Eve did by taking the fruit of that tree, Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane is required to look into the contents of a cup. What cup is this? We read about this in Luke Ch 22 verse 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." The cup He spoke of meant the terrible agony he knew he would endure-not only the horror of the crucifixion, but even worse, the total

separation from God that He would have to experience in order to die for the sins of the world.

Just pause for a moment and think about this. In Jesus' Holy nature there would be no instinct within Him that could possibly make Him desire to drink this cup. He surely did not want the contents of that cup.

I think we don't begin to grasp the horror of Calvary until we understand that everything in the Holy humanity of the Lord Jesus must have found the very concept utterly, mentally, spiritually, emotionally repulsive because he understood that whatever the mystery of this may be, on the cross He would cry out my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me.

When he said to God, why hast thou forsaken me we must remember that to lose the love of a friend hurts, that to lose the love of a spouse hurts more and the deeper and greater the relationship the more devastating and agonising is the loss of love. When Jesus Christ lost the eternal love of the Father he experienced isolation and agony that is infinitely greater than anything we would experience in an eternity of hell. [7]

He took the isolation and the pain that we deserved on himself-why?- Because He loves you and me! And so we are reminded of the beautiful and reassuring words we read today in Isaiah 53 verse 4-6

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

In going our own way we have a world full of enmity, idolatry and self



reliance. We have separated ourselves from Him. But He separated himself from God to bear the punishment for our guilt so that by His wounds we are healed!

### 3. Conclusion

God's wrath was vented at the cross and at the same time His amazing love was displayed. A writer once put it like this: "Divine wrath serves as a black velvet backdrop that causes the diamond of God's mercy to shine brighter than ten thousand suns. It is upon the dark canvas of divine wrath that the splendour of His saving grace most fully radiates. Understanding the wrath of God most brilliantly showcases His gracious mercy toward sinners. To omit God's wrath is to obscure His amazing love.[8] May we never obscure God's amazing love when we point others to God!

Remember that when Jesus came by as our friend to visit us, the bill was high. It cost Him tremendously. He travelled to the depths of alienation caused by our corrupt state and enmity with God. He did this for us, His enemies in order to take on our behalf the penalty of sin that we actually deserved.

Remember also that God created us. We are His design. Just as He has the ability to open the petals of the rose bud without harming it, so acknowledge His authority in your life so that you may bloom according to His design and that He may unfold the moments of your life so that in every moment we can glorify Him.

**[1] [1] Preaching the Wrath of God TABLETALK February 2014 Hell**

**[2] Adapted from Peace-Overcoming Anxiety by T Keller MP3 10/04/2013**

**[3] The Glory of God TABLETALK March 2014 John Knox and the Scottish Reformation**

**[4] The Glory of God TABLETALK March 2014 John Knox and the Scottish Reformation**

[5] Adapted from the website of Inspirational Christian Stories and Poems “Open the rose”

[6] Adapted from Hell: Isn't the God of Christianity and angry God by Timothy Keller  
MP3 28/01/2010

[7] Adapted and Modified(The section on Adam) God so loved the world by Dr S  
Ferguson of Ligonier Ministries MP3 18/07/2014

[8] [8] **Preaching the Wrath of God TABLETALK February 2014 Hell**