

Through Jesus Christ Our Lord

We continue our focus on Jesus and the cross. We talked last Sunday about why Jesus had to endure the cross. You remember the four great truths we discussed: **Something bad has happened.**

We are all complicit in what has gone wrong.

Something must be done about it.

Whatever it is that needs to be done, we cannot do it. We concluded only one who is life and light could fix what was wrong and save us. Only Jesus, the sinless Son of God could save us. Only through Him and his sacrifice on the cross can we gain access to God and his holy presence and to eternal life. That means salvation comes through Jesus Christ. Only through Jesus can we be saved. The apostle Paul declared, **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23**

“Through Jesus Christ our Lord.” It has been the conviction of believers since the beginning that we can only truly know God and come to him through Jesus Christ our Lord. Implied in this statement is that we can’t get to God through any other means. Why? What separates us? We say there is a gulf that exists between us and God. Part of that gulf exists because God is our infinite Creator and we are finite creatures. He is too far above us. I mean we know something of God because he made us in his own image. We understand something of his love because he created us to be loving. We understand something of his rationality because he gave us the ability to reason. We understand something of his holiness and justice because he placed a sense of morality and moral law within our hearts, but the truth is, there is no way to bridge the gulf between us and God. He is Beyond. He is Other. He is above us in every way. We can’t adequately conceive of him in order to understand or really know him. God said through the prophet Isaiah, **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’” Isaiah 55:8-9**

Any glimpse of God, any flash of insight when we think we know and understand God and his glory ends up frustrating us because we can’t quite grasp it or hold onto it. We have the bible to describe aspects of God and his nature, but we need something more concrete, something more relatable in order to comprehend God. What we need is someone to flesh out the father for us. John Stott wrote, **“For however rich the reality we have ever seen or felt or**

thought or suspected, apart from Jesus Christ, God remains the Infinitely Beyond. Only once has this Beyond come personally into our midst, when the Eternal Word of God actually became a human being and lived among us. Only then did human eyes behold true ‘glory’ in human form, the radiance of ultimate personal reality, ‘glory as of the only Son from the Father.’” ... John Stott

Our inability to comprehend God is not the only thing that separates us from him. It's not just that we aren't smart enough to understand God or know him, it is also that we have sinned against God and rebelled against him and his law so that morally we are unfit to be with him. Remember our four great truths, that something has gone terribly wrong and we are complicit in it. We sinned and our sin separates us from a holy God. We deserve punishment and the bible specifies the punishment as death, eternal separation from God. That would be just. What we deserve is one thing, what we need is unthinkable. What we need is mercy, forgiveness. What we need to be done, we cannot do. What we need is grace.

What I'm trying to say is that by ourselves we can't know or reach God. The gulf and the sin that separates us is too great. Every attempt we make to span the gulf falls into the pit below. We can't reach the other side from here, by our efforts. There is only one bridge that spans the gulf and it has been built from the other side. God's love initiated the bridge that spans the gulf. "God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son." It is Jesus who bridges the gulf. Only through him can we know God. Only through him can we have eternal life. Only through Jesus can we experience God's mercy and his forgiveness and his grace.

Look at this. The writer of Hebrews declares, **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."** Hebrews 1:1-3

What the writer of Hebrews is telling us is that God has taken action, through Jesus Christ, to span the gulf of our ignorance and our sin. Through Jesus, God has made himself known to us AND has dealt with the sin that separated us from God. We can use two fancier words to describe this. Revelation and Redemption. Both come through Jesus Christ. He

reveals the Father to us and he redeems us from our sin and unites us to God. I want to look a little deeper into these two thoughts.

Revelation is through Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells us that God has been revealing himself in the past through various ways. The bible says we are without excuse when we say we didn't have any reason to believe in God because he has been revealing himself through creation. We call this general revelation. **“Since what may be known about God is plain... because God has made it plain... For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” Romans 1:19-20**

That isn't all. God has planted something of his moral nature, his law in the heart of every person, in their own conscience. The bible says, **“When Gentiles who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness...” Romans 2:14-15**

God has been revealing himself through creation, through our conscience. He's revealed himself through the nation of Israel. Hebrews says he has spoken through the prophets, but now, uniquely, supremely, he has spoken through his Son. Jesus is the final, complete and ultimate word. Hebrews 1 says he is the appointed heir of all things, the agent through whom God created the universe. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, what the Nicene Creed called “light from light”. He is the exact representation of his being meaning when we see Jesus, we have seen and understood the Father. He reveals God to us. Let me read a description of Jesus from John Stott's book *Understanding Christ*. “He who was really God became really and truly man. Because he became man we can understand him, for we see him in the human context with which we are familiar. Because he was also God, however, what we see within his humanity is nothing less than a disclosure of the being and purpose of God. He calls God his Father and authorizes, indeed encourages us to do the same. He speaks of God's kingdom or rule and urges us to believe the good news of its arrival, to receive it ourselves and to seek it first by setting its growth before us as the supreme good to which we devote our lives. We see his power over nature as he stills storms, walks on water, multiplies loaves and fish, heals disease and reclaims people from death. We observe his reverent submission to the authority of Old Testament Scripture, his penetrating insight into its fundamental principles and his decisive rejection of all

human traditions which contradict or confuse it. We watch him treating woman and children with honor, having compassion on the poor and the despised, feeding the hungry and forgiving the sinful. We hear him snorting with indignation in the presence of death, commanding the demons to go and expressing woes and warning against hypocrites. We see him setting his face like a rock towards Jerusalem, refusing to be deflected from the path of suffering which had been written of him, experiencing agony in the garden and God-forsakenness on the Cross. And then we see him again as the Risen Lord who has secured salvation for sinners and conquered death, and who now claims universal authority and commissions his followers to go and make all nations his disciples. Through all this and much more we behold his glory and recognize it as the glory of God's only Son. He is full of grace and truth, of power and gentleness, of compassion to the humble and severity to the proud, of righteousness, faith and love. And as we watch him, his attitudes and actions mirror the Father's. To be sure, when some people talk about God, they oblige us to be atheists. 'I do not believe in God', we have to affirm, 'or at least not in the God you seem to believe in.' But when we see and hear Jesus, our response is entirely different. 'This is the God we believe in', we say, the living and true God, the God revealed through Jesus Christ. [As John writes in 1 John 5:20] For 'we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding to know him who is true.' [And] As Jesus himself is recorded as having said to Philip [in John 14:9] 'he who has seen me has seen the Father.'"

How marvelous, how unique and complete, the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. But Jesus didn't just come to show us the Father. Our ignorance of God was not our biggest problem; it was our sin that utterly separated us from God. The good news is that Jesus came to redeem us and save us from our sin. **Redemption is through Jesus Christ.**

The way this is expressed in that passage in Hebrews 1 is in language borrowed from the Old Testament sacrificial system. **"After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."** Hebrews 1:3 In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is shown to be our great high priest that offered the perfect and ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Not the blood of bulls or goats or a lamb but his own blood, his own life given for us. Hebrews refers to Jesus' sacrifice as the "better sacrifice". The priest offered sacrifices of animals over and over again, but Jesus' sacrifice was "offered once to bear the sins of many." This better sacrifice is the basis for the better covenant. Through the sacrifice of Jesus' blood once and for all, we have the forgiveness of sins! A new covenant is in force. Speaking of this new covenant

through the blood of Jesus, the Lord says in Hebrews 8 **“The time is coming when I will make a new covenant...For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Hebrews 8:8,12.**

What a promise! Through the redemption provided through Jesus’ sacrifice, he will remember our sins no more. John Stott wrote, **“It is a finished forgiveness of sins made possible only by a finished sacrifice for sins.” ...John Stott.**

Notice the writer of Hebrews mentioned that when Jesus had “made purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” He specifically mentions his being seated. In Hebrews 10 he speaks of this again. **“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties, again and again he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” Hebrews 10:11-12**

It’s interesting because no seats were provided for the priests in the tabernacle or in the temple. The reason is because their work was never done. They stood to minister because they constantly had to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. But when Jesus, the Great High Priest came, he “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” and sat down. Hallelujah! As a result of Jesus’ finished work on the cross the writer says, **“Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” Hebrews 10:19-22** We have access through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice to come into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God and there we find mercy and grace to help us. It’s all through Jesus Christ our Lord and his sacrifice on the cross!

Paul tells us the same thing in Romans 5. **“Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand...For if when we were God’s enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5:1-2, 9-11** Look at how many times the word through is used!

It is through the death of Christ that we have been reconciled to God. Through his death we have obtained access into his grace. Through Jesus Christ we have peace. Through Jesus we rejoice in God. Through Jesus we have access to this new life. All of this comes through the finished sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross.

The Father, through the Son, has revealed himself to us and has brought us to himself in reconciliation. Revelation and redemption have come through Jesus Christ alone. There can be no greater revelation nor can there be a fuller redemption than what Jesus has achieved for us. What we know about God the Father, we know through Jesus Christ and what we have received from the Father, the mercy and grace and forgiveness that saves us and makes us the redeemed sons and daughters of God, we have received through Jesus Christ. No wonder we say as Paul said, **“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Romans 7:25**

Do you want to know God and his salvation and his peace? It comes through Jesus, his son and our Savior. Ask for his cleansing. Ask for his forgiveness, his mercy, his pardon, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He will forgive and he will pardon if you will ask and it all comes through Jesus Christ our Lord.