

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our overriding theme for these Sundays of Lent is ***Those Who Wanted Jesus To Die***. That might sound strange, maybe even morbid to some, but the fact is that a look at the Passion History of Christ reveals that the main characters wanted Jesus to die: The Father, Satan, Barabbas, the High Priest, Pilate and Judas.

Concerning the motives behind Jesus' death, it has been noted "There are different agendas, conflicting purposes and motives. Many are selfish, but others catch the unfathomable dimension of God's purpose and goal, the proper, right reason that Christ must die." (Theodore W. Timler)

And that's our starting point: *The proper, right reason that Christ must die*. This First Sunday of Lent . . .

THE FATHER WANTS JESUS TO DIE

I. The Matter of Reconciliation.

It's always the same old song and dance, you know? "If God is love then why does He let all the bad things happen - the wars - the murdering - the exploitation of the helpless - the hatred - the disease - the accidents?" It's always the same old song and dance. And it seems few ever get around to asking the questions that need to be asked: "Why do humans do the things they do that result in the wars - the murdering - the exploitation of the helpless - the hatred - the disease - the accidents? If humans are so great and wonderful, and are evolving to a better state and, thus, don't need God, then why can't they stop the awful things that are growing with intensity?"

And that awful, vile word bubbles to the surface: *sin*. And those "awful" words of Jesus: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander." (Matt. 15:19) It's no wonder the world of liberal theology and the atheist work overtime to discredit the Scriptures; especially this from Paul:

"...we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks (that is, gentiles), are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.... no one does good, not even one.' (And this) 'Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.' (And this) 'Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.' (And this) 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery.... (And this) 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'" (Rom. 3:9-18 - portions)

The themes are clear from the beginning to the end of Scripture. Man is by nature sinful and unclean. Man is by nature helpless before a sinless, holy God. Man is in trouble and deserving of death and hell.

"But pastor, we need to focus on the 'good things' and the positive things that are being pursued; we need to consider the accomplishments that are beneficial." Okay, so focus on them, if you wish - consider every aspect of them, if you think that's the answer. Hide in your fantasy hideout if you think that will avoid what is now happening and what is to come on this earth. But you will - **YOU WILL** - have to deal with the words of God the Son Himself: "And because **lawlessness will be increased**, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt. 24:12,13)

Lawlessness will be increased. Does anybody even think about these words of Jesus? Is it - "Oh, everything will get better. Humans will figure it out! If we ignore it, it will go away!" You think? The paltry accomplishments of man and his "good pursuits" do not - in any way - even begin to match the unparalleled wickedness, lawlessness, lying, deception and delusion which have always been a part of man's history and are incredibly intensifying - globally!

And please understand, I'm not suggesting we shouldn't pursue good and helpful things. We should and must! But we can't hide from what this world is and what we are: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Rom 3:23) So, what can we do? Well, look to the Living, Triune God. Our text, verses 20 and 21 . . .

II. The Matter of Making Him to be Sin.

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (vss. 20-21)

As an ambassador for God, Paul faithfully represented what God wants. He wants us to be reconciled to Him. God did not declare war on man. It's the other way around. God did not sin against man. It's the other way around.

The fact is this: the reconciliation has already been accomplished through Christ. The fact is this: God does not force reconciliation. Thus, the plea: "be reconciled to God." R. C. H. Lenski writes, "It is love, condescending love alone that wins enemies, overcomes their enmity and hostility and thus works reconciliation in them." (Lenski, Interpretation of I and II Corinthians, p. 1051)

And then the basis for our theme, *God Wants Jesus To Die*. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." To quote Lenski again: "This is one of the most tremendous statements written by Paul's pen. It is so tremendous because it so completely and in such a striking form reveals what God has done for us." (Ibid., p. 1051) Peter writes, "...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (I Peter 1:18,19)

God wanted Jesus to die because - well - because, "God so loved the world..." - and that in spite of the world's hatred and war against Him! Can any of us truly fathom the nature and depth of God's love for those who are out and out enemies!? Can any of us truly fathom the greatness of God's love in light of the greatness of our stomping around in the same mud hole of sins and sinning?

And get this: Jesus wanted to die for our sins. Well, Jesus said it: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..." Jesus, God in the flesh said that.

Matthew reports, "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Matt. 16:21) They didn't hear the "third day be raised" part. And they definitely didn't hear the "must go to Jerusalem...and be killed" part. More specifically, the **must**. And do you remember the response to Jesus' words? "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him..." (Matt. 16:22a) And Jesus responded, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me." (Matt. 16:23)

Indeed, the Father "wanted" Jesus to die. And Jesus wanted to die. They are One with the Holy Spirit. One God. Three Persons. In perfect agreement and harmony. Willing to do everything so we would have forgiveness of sin. So we would be acceptable to God forever! Therefore, impressed upon us is this admonition from the Holy Spirit through Paul....

III. This Is Our Favorable Time.

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, how is the day of salvation. (2 Cor. 6:1,2)

This would apply to each of us. Do “not receive the grace of God in vain.” God has done everything for each of us for our salvation. We are to live each day understanding that it could be our last day on this earth.

And this applies to a world that, with ever increasing hostility, rejects the love of God in Christ. The world’s need for our witness might be mostly rejected, but it is our privilege and responsibility nonetheless. There are those who will be brought to faith, regardless of the church’s struggle. And regardless of the church’s struggle, these words of Jesus are well on the way to fulfillment:

Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt. 24:30-31)

Thank God that He wanted Jesus to die for us. Thank Jesus for wanting to die for our eternal salvation. Thank God that what this world is will end.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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*II Corinthians 5:20-6:2: “**The Father Wants Jesus to Die**”*

I. The Matter of Reconciliation.

II. The Matter of Making Him to Be Sin.

III. This Is Our Favorable Time.

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