How Deep the Father’s Loss Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:21

March 10, 2024 Scripture Reading: John 3:12-21

SLIDE 1: TITLE

 We are into our fourth week of Lent and throughout this time we have been considering “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”. What kind of love sacrifices all for someone else? Not only for someone else, but for someone who is deeply sinful, deeply shameful and deeply unworthy. We are all in that boat. We live in culture full of people that like to see themselves as good…decent…a least a little better than the next guy. But we need to grapple with the reality that “better than the next guy” is simply not good enough. We all fall short…we all sin. A few weeks ago, we compared it to missing the mark in archery. And then we took a look at two types of shame, one that fesses up and turns to God in confession, which results in forgiveness and the other type of shame that cause us to hide from God, which will lead us to death. But God, our Heavenly Father, wants life for us! He wants us to live with him for all eternity! And today we are going to looks at the ordeal of the cross from his perspective as we think about, “How Deep the Father’s Loss”.

 I’m sure you are familiar with the ongoing trope in movies, where they often have a character say to another, “I’ve got good news and bad news.” And the other responds, “Let’s hear the bad news first.” It’s an old setup for a joke: “That bad news is we’re lost.” “Well, what’s the good news?” “We are making good time!” Or the one where the surgeon tells his patient, “I’ve got good news and bad news.” “What’s the bad news doc?” “It seems we have amputated the wrong leg.” “What! Well, what’s the good news?” “The good news is there was nothing wrong with it.”

 A-haha. You get the idea. The bad news is a terrible statement of reality and the good news follow-up does nothing to actually mitigate that bad news, it just seeks to find a faint silver lining of some sort. Well, I think Christianity has a very similar set-up. We declare to this world, “I’ve got good news and bad news!” “What’s the bad news?” “We are all sinners separated from God and doomed to eternal punishment.”

**SLIDE 2: We are all sinners separated from God and doomed to eternal punishment.**

“Well, what is the good news?” And we reply: The gospel!

**SLIDE 3: The Good News: the Gospel!**

 In fact, that is what the word “gospel” means: good news! And our good news not only mitigate our regrettable statement about reality, but the gospel reverses the situation entirely! The bad news is we are sinners separated from God and doomed to eternal punishment. But the good news is, God loves us so much, he sent his Son to die on the cross and rise again from the dead so that sin no longer separates and we can be blessed with eternal life!” Our good news actually moves us from sinful to sinless; separation to relationship; eternal punishment to eternal life. That is the good news of the gospel. Through Christ, we can experience a complete reversal of destiny, a complete reversal of what we actually deserve. Amen!

 But at what cost? How much does it cost to enact such a reversal? Why did Jesus have to die? Why couldn’t God simply forgive us our sins? These questions comprise the crux of the Christian faith and, again, I want to take a look at them from the perspective of God the Father. The worship song that we have been considering throughout this sermon series puts it like this: “How deep the Father’s love for us, How vast beyond all measure, That He should give His only Son, to make a wretch his treasure. How great the pain of searing loss, The Father turns his face away, As wounds which mar the Chosen One, bring many sons to glory.”

 We have a lot to break down here, but I want to begin with the term Father. God is beyond our understanding. He is eternal and all-powerful and just so much bigger than we can comprehend, yet he has revealed himself to us. He has told us about himself. Now, God could have been a petty, maniacal, vindictive, vengeful god of destruction and doom. But that is not what we see in scripture. He has told us, and shown us that he is a God of love. And Jesus, he teaches his followers to pray to God as “Our Father who is in heaven.”

**SLIDE 4: God is “Our Father who is in heaven.”**

Our God is a God of love, a God with the heart of a Father. Let that sink in for a moment…how blessed are we to have such a good Father?

 When we speak of God as a loving God, we can go so far to say that God is love. We believe that throughout the revelation of scripture, God is shown to be three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God and fully distinct and yet we maintain there is one God. This is certainly a mystery we cannot fully grasp and I think it speaks to the nature of who God is…as our eternal Creator, it makes sense that we would not be able to fully comprehend his nature. As a Trinity, we can say that God is in his very nature relational. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit and the Spirit loves the Father and out of this overflow of love all of creation bursts out, including you and I…humans made in the image of God, humans who are also intrinsically built for relationships. So now the Father’s Love, already shared with the Son and the Holy Spirit, is now also directed at us, his creation. He loves us, but the bad news is, he is not able to be with us. Because he is holy, perfect, pure, completely set apart, and we are not. We fall short, we miss the mark, we sin. We are not holy and so there is separation. The Father’s love cannot find it’s object.

**SLIDE 5: The Bad News: The Father’s love cannot find it’s object.**

 So, the Bible then recounts for us the story of God forging a way for us to be with him. And that story culminates eventually in God himself becoming one if us through the miracle of the incarnation. Jesus is born and we maintain that he was fully God and fully man. And God the Father loves him and is well pleased with him, but his mission here was not a pretty one…We know that the wages of sin is death, that death is the price to pay, and Jesus knew his life was the one on the line. In the garden of Gethsemane it is determined that, despite Jesus’ suggestion for another way, another possibility, the cross was the only way. His death would pay the price for our sins. The life of the only begotton Son would, as the song has it, “make a wretch (that’s you and I) his treasure.” But again, we must ask, at what cost could this great work be accomplished? I would say, it came at the highest possible cost.

 I have heard atheists flippantly say, “What’s the big deal? Jesus knew he would rise again, so really the whole thing only cost him a weekend!” No, this was not a bad weekend…

 As Jesus was crucified, as his mangled body was lifted up and the wooden beam fell into place, he was in physical agony certainly, but he was also the One and only One who was to bear the sins of mankind.

**SLIDE 6: The Good News: Jesus bears the sins of mankind.**

He was the One and only One who would ever experience the cold shoulder of God the Father as, in the great pain of searing loss the Father turns His face away from the plight of his Son. We cannot underestimate this moment – we must try to absorb it if we can: God the Father turned away from the plight if his beloved Son.

 In the crippling, undeserved loneliness, a sense of being alone that you and I will never feel, Jesus utters a question, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

SLIDE 7: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

It is not an original question. Jesus is actually quoting King David in Psalm 22. He echoes this ancient cry for help…but, like Jesus does with all of scripture, this time, when it is spoken, the words are fulfilled. David was having a tough time, Jesus was truly forsaken. This is the same God who is known to rescue his people, the God who is slow to anger and abounding with love, the God who is faithful to his promises. Yet here his only begotten Son is forsaken, abandoned. Again, the critique of unbelievers may arise here as they accuse God of cosmic child-abuse as he punishes Jesus for a wrong he did not even commit. But the doctrine of the Trinity does not allow for such a split between the Father and the Son. At no point are they ever working against one another. God is one, his love is one – there is no conflict here. In John 10:18 Jesus is clear that he knows the plan, he knows what is at stake when he says, “This is why the Father loves me; I give up my life so that I can take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I give it up because I want to.”

**SLIDE 8: “This is why the Father loves me; I give up my life so that I can take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I give it up because I want to.”**

Jesus knew the plan and Jesus agreed to the plan, which makes the Father’s loss of pain all the greater.

 Imagine if you had a child who was convicted by a court and was forced to serve a prison sentence. This would certainly be one of the most difficult things for a parent to endure, but the depth of that pain would also depend on the guilt of the child. If they were guilty of some crime, there would be a pain and regret but there would also be a sense of justice being served. I would imagine that pain of loss and separation would be much greater if your child were innocent but still had to pay the consequences.

 That is a glimmer of the position of God the Father as he sees his Son knowingly accepting the consequence for sins and crimes of which he was completely innocent. But, it is the plan nonetheless. It’s how undeserving wretches can become treasured children of God. The Son forsaken, abandoned and left utterly alone, so that you and I would never be forsaken or abandoned or left even remotely alone. That’s the cost. To change everything; to reverse everything; cost everything.

**SLIDE 9: to reverse everything; cost everything.**

 Of course, there is certainly much more that could be said of this reality bending sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but I want to focus in on one final aspect: Wrath. Wrath is simply defined as extreme anger.

**SLIDE 10: Wrath: extreme anger.**

And if you think the wrath of a temperamental person burns hot, consider the wrath of God the Father. And you might say, “Well, wait a minute here. We just got done talking about how God is so merciful and compassionate…how does that square with wrath?” I think this is a question many people have, both Christians and non-Christians. But it is also a question that arises because we misunderstand love. If I love my children, which I do, I will simultaneously hate that which would hurt them. If I love my children, I will also hate whatever it is that might stand in the way of our healthy relationship. If I love my children, I will punish them for wrongdoing because I love them, because I would hate for them to continue down a wrong path. I would hate for them to persist in making poor choices. God is a God of love and therefore he is also a God of justice. He loves truth, he loves righteousness, and as such, we must understand, he hates sin, he hates injustice.

**SLIDE 11: God loves truth and hates sin.**

And we all know, this world is full of both of those things. In fact, within our own hearts, we struggle with sin. We are a part of and involved with the very thing that God hates.

**SLIDE 12: We are involved with the very thing that God hates.**

And that rightfully causes God to be angry. This is the bad news: our sin had stored up wrath.

**SLIDE 13: bad news: our sin had stored up wrath.**

 But the apostle Paul teaches us in 2 Corinthians 5: 21 that ‘God caused the One who didn’t know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God.” This concept has a very fancy title. We refer to it as propitiation.

**SLIDE 14: The good news: Jesus is our propitiation!**

Propitiation refers to “a sacrifice that bears God;s wrath to the end and so doing changes God’s wrath toward us into favor.” That’s the good news! A complete reversal of the bad state of things. Wrath becomes favor because Jesus was willing to go to the cross and not just bear sin, but as Paul says, to become sin. God hates sin! And here Jesus become the very thing God hates, takes on the wrath of that hatred, a wrath we could never endure for a split second. And by this act of sacrifice, we not only can be forgiven of our sins, but we can become the righteousness of God!

 The fact is, God does not deal with us in strictly legal terms. If he did, none of us would have any case. None of us would wake up tomorrow! We would all be condemned from the word “go” and rightly so. That is the bad news. But, because God is love and he is driven by his desire to know us and to be known by us in a true and living relationship, He has taken it upon himself to bear the burden and consequence for our sin. We are granted a stay; an eternal stay where we in fact do not get what we deserve. That is the good news!

**SLIDE 15: That is the good news!**

 On the cross, from his depth of suffering, Jesus asks the Father, “Why have you forsaken me?” And God the Father replies, “I have good news and bad news.” We might imagine Jesus saying, “What is the bad news?” “You must bear the guilt of the sin of all mankind. You must have all my righteous wrath thrown upon you. You must endure my turning away.” “What then could possibly be the good news?” “By your sacrifice, all humanity will be able to share in our righteousness. By your sacrifice these wretches will be made into our treasure.” And Jesus agrees, “It’s all worth it then.”

 This is what the death of Jesus achieved. This is what our faith affords us. This is the outcome of the Father’s love for us. And so we must repent, believe and be saved. Hear the good news: In Christ you can find forgiveness of sins, peace in the present and life everlasting. This is the good news that we call the gospel. Amen.