

2 Sam. 22:1-7, 47; Psalm 65:1-5; May 14, 2017

Luke 8:1-3, John 11:38-44

Mother's Day – Sonshine Singers

Our Savior is Personal

There is an old story of an adult Sunday school class in which the teacher asks, “For whom did Jesus die on the cross?” Members of the class gave answers like, “Everybody,” “The whole world,” all of which are true. But one man in the class answered this way, “He died for me, and for you, and you,” looking directly at each one in the room, “... and all the people.” The difference in his answer was the personal connection. Jesus is at once “my Savior” and “our Savior.”

God so loved the people of this world that He came in person. That person is Jesus Christ ... who was born into this world just like each of us, who lived our life, and died our death. **Jesus was one of us, yet much more than any of us.** Because of Him we know that God, who created us, cares for us, listens to us - If He had a refrigerator your photo would be on it - and walks with us through our lives.

God is Personal

Three weeks ago I spoke to you about how God is personal in Himself. **The Trinity teaches us that the three persons of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) have eternally loved one another with a selfless love.** God has always been personally relational, always loving. Each one of us has been fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and so we have a longing for personal relationships. Likewise, woven into our very nature is a desire for His qualities of love, justice, and mercy, which are given and received person-to-person, just as God gives to each of us personally.

Despite God's design for humans, hatred, cruelty, deceit and all manner of evil abound in the world now and throughout history. What is often more difficult to see is how these terrible things have a root in *ourselves* – contrary to God's image in us. Could it be that we do not realize how deep and how wide is sin – even in our own lives?

Harder still to see is how sin has broken our spirits so to speak, and how each person acts out of that brokenness in ways that causes them to drift from God's desire and design for their life. So the human problem is really a personal one. “The heart of our problems is the problem of our hearts.” That's why God provides a personal remedy: personal healing in the person of Jesus – God with us. He is the way to wholeness. **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,”** Jesus said (John 14:6).

Salvation Is Personal

One of the great stumbling blocks for many is understanding how the death of Christ on the Cross can have anything to do with *me*. How can Jesus be a solution to my brokenness, my sin? It begins by realizing that much of human history is the story of people rebelling against God's design. Today, many in our culture believe that one's *individual desire* is the source of authority and self-definition. This belief is diametrically opposed to **the Christian understanding of human life and its purpose** that says we are "*fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Psalm 139:14) and that our lives are "*not our own*" (1 Cor. 6:19). **We belong to God.**

So what can God do about it? God could *impose* His will on us. But that would be a total violation of our free will and of His love. God wants people who *want* to obey and love Him.

On the other hand, God could condemn us permanently to separation from Him, which would actually be just, given our behaviors. But where's the love in that? Or, God could just pretend that sin and wickedness don't really matter. But what would that say about God's character, his integrity, and justice? What would that say about knowing what is right and what is wrong?

The Bible reveals to us that God's bold dream for fallen, broken, and sinful humans, is redemption *with* justice acted out on the cross. On the Cross we see unquestionable justice (the penalty for sin is death), and at the same time we see extravagant love. **God didn't pretend that our sin and wickedness doesn't matter. He just paid for them out of His own account.** God didn't allow the wrong person to be punished – Jesus who was without sin. Rather, He upheld the penalty we deserved and then went and endured it Himself. **"Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens"** Psalm 68:19.

Because Jesus was human, it was a person standing for every individual human being, right at the place of our greatest need. Because Jesus was God, the effect of what He has done is limitless. On the Cross Jesus did not just *represent* each one of us, he *replaced* each of us. **Jesus "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world," 1 John 2:2.** His salvation is not a general salvation but personal – one heart transformed at a time.

What mother does not love her children? Even when her child goes astray and gets into dark places, any mother who is in her right mind and heart still loves that child, and would do just about anything to redeem that child from his/her messed up life. This is what Jesus illustrated on the Cross. Jesus said, **"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be**

saved” John 10:9. The Cross shows that God will go to any length to bring us back to himself.

Our Savior Is Still Personal

Mary Magdalene is mentioned in all four Gospels as being present at the Crucifixion and then coming to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body. Only Luke gives us some more background on Mary Magdalene. It says, *“...The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out...”* **Luke 8:1-2.** We can only speculate on what those seven demons were in Mary’s life, but clearly she was a transformed woman, having been healed by Jesus. Very early on Sunday morning, a couple of days after she’d witnessed His crucifixion, Mary went to Jesus’ tomb. **Jesus appeared to her and called her by name... he knows your name ... that’s a very personal thing (John 20:10-18).** She recognized His voice.

John 11 tells of another one who was called and transformed by Jesus. A friend of Jesus, Lazarus, died. After hearing word of his friend’s death it says that He was *“deeply moved in spirit”* and that *“Jesus wept.”* When Jesus called him forth from the tomb He simply called him by name, saying in a loud voice *“Lazarus, come forth.”* Jesus got personal with his friends – He still does. He offers to get personal with each of us. He still calls forth people by name into life.

I wonder if too many American Christians have missed out on this, because they actually adhere to a kind mushy religion that sees self-fulfillment and material comfort as the purpose of life. But that mushy, self-centered religion is a far cry from personally connecting with the Living God; the God of the Bible, who is the God of reality. **Genuine Christianity teaches us that true purpose and meaning is found in repentance from our sin, self-sacrificial love, purity of heart,** even commending suffering for Jesus as the true pathway to God.

Watching the reality show “Undercover Boss” the thought came to me that’s what God did. What I mean is having the CEO go undercover, get his/her hands dirty, work out in the field with company employees, is kind of like God coming among us. And when it was later revealed to those employees who that person was, whom they’d been working with or training, it transformed them. They were often brought to tears to know that the boss listened to them, cared about them, and made a positive difference in their lives.

God does that. In Jesus, God is willing to get personal with each of us. It requires a personal response from us. How do you do that? Pretty much like other friendships you may have. If you want a good, deep friendship you have to spend time with Him. Long ago I was given sage advice by an

experienced mentor who told me: “Be careful who you have as your friends, for they will influence you.” Maybe that’s something we’ve let slide as we become wrapped up in our own desires and activities and the associations that go with them. Do we genuinely seek friendship with Jesus? **How much time do you spend, or not spend, with Jesus?** Do you ignore Him until you need help? What kind of friend does that make you?

Yet He is unlike any friend you’ll ever have. He is at once your Creator, the Judge of your sins, your Savior who takes the punishment you deserve, and your help in time of need. That’s some kind of friend!

John Wesley, referring to his conversion experience said, “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.” Before that time he had remarkable answers to his prayer, especially in times of trouble, but he was “still only striving with, not freed from sin.”

Our Savior is the only one who frees you from your sins; He’s that personal. He can save you from the evils of this world and save you from evils that lurk in your own heart. And the amazing truth in all this is that, through you He can personally reach others with His healing grace and goodness.

“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens” Psalm 68:19.