

The Why of It All, R&R Crossing

Last week we began a sermon series on relationships; relationship with God, relationship with each other, and we answered the first of four why questions. Why did God create the world and us? And we saw that Christianity is the only religion where the God at the center of it, wants something with us, instead of from us. He wants a relationship with us. He wants to walk with us. That reminded me of an interview I once read about. It was an interview of a couple that had been married 75 years. They were asked, 'what's the secret to making a marriage to last that long?' The answer from that old man was very profound. He said 'the secret is to work to be with each other, instead of working to get from each other. And isn't that what you really want in a relationship? Those of you who are married, those of you who would like to get married, those of you who have maybe experienced a failed marriage or a failed relationship; wouldn't you love to be in a relationship with someone who actively worked to be with you, to spend time with you? That's how much they want to be with you.

That leads us to today's question, why did God forgive us? And the second question that goes with it, why did He sacrifice His son for us? But let's go back to last week again. Remember we are created in the image of God, and I challenge you to keep that in your mind as we go through this sermon series. God created us in His image for relationship. And so, who among you, has children, grandchildren, great grandchildren? Who of you want a great relationship with your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren? What would you be willing to do to be with your children, your grandchildren, your great grandchildren? Now you have a better understanding of God. I would do almost anything to be with my little granddaughter Avery. Literally, I think I would give up anything, more or less, I should say, other than my faith in Christ. Anything else I would be willing to give up, to be with her. And this is how God is towards us.

And it's the foundation behind our gospel this morning, the parable of the prodigal son. The father who is God; he forgave the son the minute he gave the son in the inheritance. Notice he did not give the inheritance and scold his son, warn his son, threaten his son, ridicule his son. No, he just gave it to him and forgave him so that the son would have a road home. If he had scolded him, ridiculed him, any of that; the son would be, 'I can't go home. Dad's going to be so ticked at me.' But the father let him go, with the inheritance, without comment so that he could be

standing with his arms open and ready to hug his son if, and when, his son came home. It's that image of the cross. And when we think about being created in the image of God, and in this image of the cross, open to hugging, we may say; 'Oh, yeah, right arm and the left arm.' But understand though that's not the way it is. In our image, we have two arms, one is for reconciliation, the other is for restoration because the two go together to bring someone back. Reconciliation is a banking term: to bring into balance. We reconcile our checking account probably monthly at least. Restoration is to re-establish what once was. Now we take that and put that into the context of last week. What we saw is that forgiveness always requires a sacrifice. And it's why God forgives and sent His Son to reconcile, to balance the account. Because sin equals death. So, a death sacrifice had to be made for forgiveness. But listen very carefully please. We are not just saved from sin and death; nor are we just saved from hell for heaven. We are saved for God, as we heard last week; that I may be His own, and to restore the relationship we were created for. For relationship with Him and for relationship with each other. It's a restoration to the garden to walk with God, not leave Him alone in the garden; and to walk with each other, who are created in His image.

The problem that we have as Christians, and all too often as the church; is that we struggle with this, we have some confusion when it comes to this. We have a hard time remembering how we are saved, if we don't believe and understand the why we are saved. We all too often, simply think transactionally. Now what do I mean by that? Well, a transaction is an if/then statement (If I give you this, then you give me this) that we tend to apply to salvation. If I have sinned, then I must do something to reconcile or appease God. If I do not appease God, or reconcile with God, I don't have forgiveness. And our problem is that we tend to apply those very kinds of thoughts to God.

That leads us to five realities, godly realities. You're not going to like number one. Reality- the Bible teaches sin equals death. That is the only appeasement, the only payment, the only way to reconcile and to bring us into account with God. And I'm not just talking dead. I'm talking really dead; physical and spiritual, eternal death-hell. You really don't want to say I'm going to earn my way to heaven because that is the only payment that is satisfactory. And all too often, too many Christians and churches preach this option; that you must earn your way to heaven. When you do so, you are rejecting Christ and His sacrifice the only payment for our sin, that can lead to salvation.

That leads to reality two. God appeased Himself through Christ. For us to appease Him means we would be out of relationship forever because we would be in hell. So, He appeased Himself by sending His Son. Which leads us to reality number

three, the forgiver is the one who sacrifices. We heard that last week. In this case, it's God. He sacrificed His son. What does that mean for us? Then we should like him sacrifice ourselves for each other, sacrifice our pride, or anger, or hurt, whatever. We'll get in to that a little bit more. But reality number four-forgiveness is a gift from the forgiver. Consider Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9 "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing; it is a gift from God. Not because of works, lest any man should boast." Or as Paul writes; "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold the new has come." Now listen to this. "All this is from God." Let me repeat that, "all this is from God." Now that's amazing! That's the big spiritual, wow! But like a good commercial... wait there's more! "All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." It's what our whole introit this morning was about. Real reconciliation. The reconciliation, the ministry that He has given us which leads to reality number five.

We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven. Ephesians 4, verse 32. So, we are called to sacrifice self, our anger, our pride, for reconciliation and restoration, and it leads to the biblical role of repentance. Repentance is to recognize that we've broken the relationship, or that we have wronged others. It's not that we've broken a rule and hell awaits. No, we've broken the relationship. We've left God walking in the garden alone, as I said last week. But what did He do? He reconciled the world to Himself. He, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; sacrificed Himself to bring the account into balance, to reconcile it, to truly the sin equals death. It's equal. It's done and He did it to restore. Because without reconciliation, there is no restoration.

And what does that restoration look like? On Easter when Jesus rose from the dead, what did He do That evening? He went to those who had wronged Him. His disciples, the apostles, they had abandoned Him, they had denied Him. Peter denied Him three times and invoked a curse on himself. And Jesus comes to them, and what does He say? Peace be with you. I can tell you, most assuredly, there was no peace in them at that moment. They probably were scared to death. They were probably thinking transactionally. We denied Him, He's come, he's going to take it out of our hide. But instead, He says, "peace be with you." There's forgiveness. And now listen carefully and ponder this. He didn't stop there. "As the Father has sent me, so even now, I am sending you." All too often, we in our sinful mind, we go 'yeah, yeah, yeah, OK pastor will go into the Great Commission, we are being sent. OK we had heard it a jillion times.' 'not hardly!' That is not what He is saying here. It's much bigger, it's much harder. So much harder, that we read, 'He breathed on them and said, "receive the Holy Spirit."' That same Holy Spirit that He said would come with power. Why power? Because to reconcile, to forgive, requires us to sacrifice ourself. Just as the Father sent Him to sacrifice Himself; He sends us to sacrifice

ourselves. And He says, 'if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.' To forgive, we must sacrifice as Jesus did. Reconciliation in Christianity begins with the wronged. Why because God was wronged, and God began the process through Jesus Christ.

In fact, consider what Jesus Himself did on the cross. His arms stretched out paying the price of our sin, opening up to us the hug to say you could come home anytime; and He prays for those who drove those nails through His hands and His feet; "Father forgive them." Why? So that the road for even those Roman soldiers, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, describes the priests; the road was opened for them to come back. And it's why those disciples truly walked with Him. He forgave them. He restored the relationship. And it was such a great relationship with so much love that those disciples died for Him, and for those they were loving like Him.

This is our challenge. We live in a society and all too often a Church of broken relationships. When I was 12 years old, my dad received a call to go to Bishop to serve at Grace Lutheran Church. Why? They had been through a split. It's a good thing that happened, that dad took that call because my first call was to a church in Lodi that had just gone through a split. They had lost a teacher or two as a result and I was a teacher filling in, taking over for one of those that had left. Pastor Huber came at the exact same time. He was the pastor called to a church that had just been through a split. Fourteen years later I was called to Zion, a church that had been through its second split. How many of you have experienced that kind of split? A split in the church? A split in the marriage, split with a friend, a family member. Hear Christ's words. "As the Father has sent me, so I am now sending you." This week ahead is a week of a challenge, a week to do what Jesus did; sacrifice self and work to be with each other. Forgive, reconcile, open those arms, and be restored as we have been restored to God through Jesus Christ. Amen