

Nothing but the Blood of Jesus

Ephesians 1:7-10

Introduction

Stuart Briscoe recalls a time when he first moved to the United States when he needed something explained to him [appropriate on this Super Bowl Sunday]

Stuart Briscoe: ‘It was January 1 when I arrived on my first visit to the United States. I turned on the television and saw a picture the like of which I had never seen before. It was a rear view shot of a row of big men in tight pants bending over in such a fashion that they appeared to be putting intolerable strain on said pants.

Behind them stood a man who seemed to have lost his temper completely. He was yelling and shouting, apparently because the other men had his ball and he wanted it back. Eventually after much shouting, they gave it to him. He promptly gave it to one of his friends who ran a few steps and was treated to an awful beating by some other men wearing similar tight pants, but of a different color.

They were apparently very sorry about their behavior because, after they had beaten him up, they gathered in a small group to pray about it. They were not sincere, however, because they went straight back and did the same thing again.

After repeating this whole outrageous procedure about 10 times, the man with the ball suddenly threw it about 60 yards to another man I hadn’t noticed before. He caught it, ran a few yards, did a funny little dance, and the crowd went wild. I thought I had stumbled on some religious festival [subsequently I discovered I was right!] – and was completely mystified until someone started to explain what was happening so that a newly arrived Englishman could understand.’

Sometimes – we need life explained to us!

The Apostle Paul is taking us aside this morning to explain life to us

Many people look at life and our world and say: ‘what is this all about?’ - - - ‘Can somebody explain this to me?’

- Why do we live but 70 or 80 years and pass off the scene to what or where?
- Why do nations go to war – drop bombs on one another?
- Why do people lie / steal / kill?
- What is man?
- Where did we come from?
- Where are we going?
- Is there any meaning to this thing we call life?

Astronaut Gene Cernan is the last American to have walked on the moon.

He once said these words about man’s existence

Gene Cernan: 'Curiosity is the essence of human existence. 'Who are we? Where are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?' ... I don't know. I don't have any answers to those questions. I don't know what's over there around the corner. But I want to find out.'

In his mind – space exploration was about finding out more about who man is in the universe – understanding our place in it.

20th century French Philosopher Andre Maurois: 'The universe is indifferent. Who created it? Why are we on this puny mud-heap, spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea, and I am convinced that no one else has the least idea.'

What is this world all about?

Carl Sagan once described human beings as 'newborn babies left on earth's doorstep with no note explaining who we are and where we came from, let alone where we go from here.'

Fortunately – there is a note explaining such things

It is called the Bible

Man is created by God – [who we are / where we came from]

Man chose to rebel against God [that explains where evil came from]

Man as he exists right now – is a sinner [explains why we see sin in our world]

God has sent His Son into the world to redeem sinners thru His death on the cross / resurrection

Jesus Christ will one day be acknowledged by all as Lord – to the glory of God the Father [that is where this world is headed] - - - some going to a resurrection of judgment / others going to a resurrection unto life

The grand overarching narrative of Scripture has four movements: Creation / Fall / Redemption / Renewal

John Stott: 'History is neither meaningless nor purposeless. It is moving towards a glorious goal.'

There is a kingdom to come – That is what Paul refers to this morning

He says we are moving forward to the consummation – the summing up of all things in Christ – things upon earth and in heaven

I. Redemption - vv. 7-8

The biblical description of the flow of history is that of creation, Fall, Redemption / Renewal

After God created humanity – something went wrong / out of harmony / sin / death have entered the picture

We were made in the image of God – but now we fall short of the glory of God

We now find ourselves on a planet where all kinds of sin / depravity take place

We ourselves are described by Scripture as being dead in our trespasses and sins
We are alienated from God - - - man's relationship with God has been broken thru sin

Because of sin / rebellion – there will be a day of judgment in the future - - - a day when God will recompense sinners for sinful actions committed in this world

Judgment points to the fact that we are moral creatures – accountable before a holy God for our actions

Eccl. 12:14 - 'God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.'

Eph. 5:6 - 'Let no one deceive you with empty words for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.'

We live in a moral universe
Some things are right / some are wrong

Man – as a sinner - is guilty of trespassing God's boundaries / breaking His commandments
In doing so – he is now under the wrath of God

This wrath of God is what makes the concept of redemption so vital

If people are to be saved from the wrath of God – there must be some kind of redemption / atonement - - - a means of securing the forgiveness of sins

That is what Paul comes to here in v. 7 - - - redemption thru the blood of Jesus

Redemption [ἀπολυτρωσιν] – a term used for the release of a slave or prisoner

Redemption also referred to reclaiming of lost property

In Jewish law – if a person lost property thru a debt – or a death - - - there were laws in place to allow property to be redeemed

Boaz served as a kinsman redeemer of Ruth

In a sense – we became lost property – God reclaimed us thru the redemption of Christ / setting us free from our bondage to iniquity

Redemption involves a price / a cost

In this case – the cost of our redemption is the blood of Jesus

I Peter 1:18-21

Christians are individuals bought with a price

Jesus paid the penalty for our sins / satisfying the wrath of God against us / He bore the curse of the law

I Corinthians 6:20 - 'For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.'

Mark 10:45 - 'The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.'

The currency of the redemption price is the blood of Christ / His death

That's what the cross was all about – an atonement to cover over sin / a redemption to buy us out of slavery

Some people trip over this / stumble at the cross

They seem to act like – 'if God is going to save people – He better do it in a way that I approve of.'

Richard Dawkins [atheist]: 'It's a horrible idea that God, this paragon of wisdom and knowledge, power, couldn't think of a better way to forgive us our sins than to come down to Earth in his alter ego as his son and have himself hideously tortured and executed so that he could forgive himself.'

Dawkins is no fan of Christianity – and we might even find his statement a bit incoherent [God forgiving himself?] - - - but we see – in his mind – God ought not save people this way

Drawing a little closer to the church – we find two feminist theologians who do not like the idea of redemption by the blood of Jesus

Rita Brock / Pastor Rebecca Parker: 'At the center of western Christianity is the story of the cross, which claims God the Father required the death of his Son to save the world. We believe this theological claim sanctions violence.'

The idea of someone having to die for our sins – that sounds like it condones violence / etc.

That's no good – not a very wise plan
For them – the idea of redemption by the blood of Jesus is unacceptable

Romans 11:33-36

Who did God consult before He made the world?
Who counsels Him on how to save sinners?

Answer: no one - - - He is God

Woe – to the person who thinks they ought to serve as counselor to God

I Cor. 1:18 - 'The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.'

The bible is clear – we are saved from the wrath of God thru the blood of Jesus Christ

If we did not have the Bible – if we did not have the revelation of God to explain such things
– if we did not the preparation made by Jesus – in calling the apostles – so that they could
serve as witnesses – declare the meaning of such things – we would be in the dark

A lot of people died by crucifixion in the 1st century Roman Empire.

What is so special or significant about this Jewish carpenter?

What is unique about this one is that He was born of a virgin / that He walked on water /
raised Lazarus from the dead Himself / was transfigured in glory before the disciples – that
He claimed to be the Son of God – He left behind an empty tomb - - - and left such
convincing evidence that His disciples then became willing to die for their faith rather than
deny the truth of what happened

That is what is so significant about this crucifixion

Heb. 9:26 - 'Once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to
put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.'

Rom. 5:9 - 'Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be
saved from the wrath of God through Him.'

Matt. 26:28 - 'This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many
for forgiveness of sins.'

David Allen: 'Scripture consistently teaches that humanity's sin has incurred the wrath of God and that this wrath is only averted by the substitutionary atonement provided by Christ on the cross.'

The cross points to both the love of God and the awful nature of sin

John 3:16

MLJ: 'The forgiveness of sins constituted such a problem that nothing but the shedding of Christ's blood could deal with it. God could not forgive sins merely by speaking a word . . . sin is so terrible, so foul and so vile that nothing could deal with it but the blood of Christ.'

That is why the cross is central to Christian theology

In Christ Alone

On the cross as Jesus died

The wrath of God was satisfied

II. *God's blueprint for the Ages - vv. 9. 10*

Here Paul refers to this grand program of God that is taking shape

Paul sees God the Father working according to His own timetable and program

Mystery = simply a truth once hidden but now made known

God's purposes have been revealed to Paul and to the church – truths that were veiled or hinted at in the OT era

God's purpose began to be revealed to Abraham [before that to Adam and Eve] – when God said: 'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' [Gen. 12:3]

With Abraham – He didn't know everything of how this blessing would come about – that there would be an atonement / etc.

We speak of the progressive nature of revelation

When we come to Christ and the apostles – many truths were fully revealed that earlier were only hinted at in types and rituals

The arrival of the Messiah was at an appointed time

Gal. 4:4, 5 - 'When the fullness of the time came God sent forth His Son born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.'

Christ came and He divides earthly history in two

Pre-cross / post-Calvary

At His first coming – that was a fullness of the times – a time set by the Father - - - it was not random – it was exactly when God the Father established that it would occur

There is another fullness of the times where - ultimately - all will be 'summed up' under Christ.

v. 10 - 'That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him.' [KJV]

Οικονομία = dispensation [arrangement / ordering]

There is a dispensation coming – when all will be summed up under Christ [the kingdom]

There is a goal of history – and it is not meaningless

God created the world – sin entered the world – necessitating a Redeemer - - - the Redeemer came in the person of Jesus - - - finally – there will be a new heaven and a new earth – in the eternal state – bringing things to a state of harmony

Dispensationalism is that branch of theology that recognizes earthly periods of history – such as the age of innocence [before the Fall] – there is the age of Promise / Law - - - in which many types and shadows pointed forward to the coming of Christ [God working thru Abraham and the nation of Israel]

Then the Redeemer came - we have the dispensation of the church age [closes with the rapture] - - - tribulation / kingdom / new heaven and new earth

R.C. Sproul: 'The destiny of creation is not an open-ended matter of chance, for God has determined from the foundation of the world how the universe is going to end up.'

Phil. 2:8-11 – 'every knee shall bow . . .'

H.A. Ironside: 'all created intelligences will own the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Ultimately – the plague of sin will be removed from the creation

The first things will have passed away – Rev. 21

Christ will return / God's kingdom is coming [the curse lifted / order restored]

Read to the end of the book

We see that Jesus wins / His church wins / His people are blessed for all eternity

MLJ: 'the perfect harmony that will be restored will be harmony in man and between men. Harmony on the earth and in the brute creation! Harmony in heaven, and all under this blessed Lord Jesus Christ who will be the head of all! Everything will again be united in Him. And wonder of wonders, marvelous beyond compare, when all this happens, it will never be undone again. All will be reunited in Him to all eternity. That is the message. That is God's plan. That is the mystery which has been revealed unto us . . . These things are so marvelous that you will never hear anything greater, either in this world or the world to come.'

Conclusion

God's Word comes to us and says, 'You are a sinner - under the wrath of God - - - you need to have your sins washed away.'

Here is the one solution: redemption by the blood of Jesus

What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus

We rejoice in that program

Jesus came once in the program of God to die for sinners
He is coming again to reign over the kingdom

Heb. 9:28 - 'so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of man, shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.'