The Cross - God Dies

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[0:00] stories. Before we listen to those stories, we're going to pray. Our Father God, we thank you so much for the true story of the Bible from the beginning of time, from eternity past to eternity to come. Your great plan, your plan of salvation for mankind. And it's our prayer this morning that we would grasp afresh your plan of salvation, what you have done for us, how it changes us, and how it provides for our deepest and greatest need. Father, would you please speak to us afresh through your word, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, here's the story. It was just one week before her wedding day. Annie had dreamed of it ever since she was a little girl, and now it was soon to become a reality. Together with her fiancé, they had saved up to buy a house. And over the weeks, they had been painting and decorating, making sure everything was in order so that they could move in after the wedding. On this particular evening, after being out for dinner, they called by the house to drop off a couple of gifts a friend had kindly bought them. As they went in, it became obvious that somebody else that somebody else was in the house. Before they could do anything about it, the intruder ran past and pushed Annie's fiancé to the floor. He fell awkwardly, banged his head against the radiator, causing severe trauma. It was later that evening that Annie got the news from the news from the hospital that her fiancé had sadly died due to his injuries. What would you want to happen to that intruder? What would you want to happen to that intruder? Jimmy was a hard-working young lad. He lived at home with his mum and was managing to hold down two jobs to get through college and to help his mum out. After an evening out, Jimmy was walking home with friends. Passing by what seemed like an empty house, one of them dared Jimmy to see if he could climb through one of the open windows, get into the house and let himself out through the front door. Jimmy had just managed to get through the window when he heard somebody come into the house. For fear of being caught, he made a run for it and he pushed the man out the way. Later that evening, Jimmy was picked up by the guards when he learned that the man he had pushed died. He was devastated. What would you want to happen to the intruder now? It's not easy, is it, to make those kinds of decisions. On one side of the story, it has us demanding justice. But the other side of the story has us desiring grace. I guess what we want is for justice to be done and for grace to be given. We want the criminal punished, but we want some compassion to be shown. But how is that actually possible? How can Jimmy be sentenced to life, which is what he deserves for the crime he committed, and at the same time have his sentence suspended, which is what Jimmy himself desires? How can justice and grace sit side by side without giving way to the other?

Well, that's one of the big issues confronting us as we read through the story of the Bible. You remember how the story began. God created a good and a beautiful world, God. And central to his creation were people. God provided for them and gave to them everything that they needed. And in return, we were made to love God, to obey him and to enjoy him.

Everything was good and perfect and beautiful. But instead, we rebelled against God. We rejected him and ignored him. Instead of listening to God, we decided we want to be God and we want to live life as we please. And as a result, everything broke. Our relationship to God broke. We became separated from him. We became separated from each other and with creation. Everything broke down.

And the question that we ask is, well, how would God respond to all of this rebellion? Would he be angry and judge? Or would God be loving and forgiving? Would God bring his justice, which is what we deserve? Or would he show grace, which is what we all desire?

[6:08] Well, have a look at Exodus chapter 34 and see how God introduces himself. It's one of the great summaries of how God introduces himself to us. Exodus 34 verse 5.

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This is where Moses has come to meet God. And verse 5 reads, then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him, that's Moses, and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And God passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.
Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of their fathers to the third and fourth generation.
Do you see what we have there? A picture of who God is? A God who is both full of justice and full of grace. He brings punishment, but yet he offers forgiveness. He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but yet he holds the guilty accountable.
He's gracious with us, but yet brings judgment upon us. And this is the tension that we see running through the whole story of the Bible.
[8:01] Every story and every action of God, we see God responding in justice or in grace.

God cannot ignore our sin. It must be punished. But yet God longs to forgive our sins so that we do not perish.
So here's the big question before us all this morning. How can God judge us, which is what we deserve, but yet show grace, which is what we all desire?
Well, at the centre of the story and the climax of the whole Bible story is the cross where God dies. Because at the cross, we see God both punish our sin and provide for our salvation.
At the cross, grace and justice flow to the world. It's summarised for us so well in Romans chapters 1 to 3.
[9:15] So turn in your Bible. We're going to be looking at Romans 1 to 3, which is almost like a summary. The first three chapters are like a summary of the whole story of the Bible, which climax in the death of God on the cross.

So Romans chapter 1. And the first thing we notice in Romans chapter 1 is, is that we all deserve judgment.
The justice of God should flow on us. You see, that's the whole story of the Bible, isn't it? As we've been following along the story, is that we're all under God's judgment.
Have a look at chapter 1, verse 18. The wrath of God, the anger of God, is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.
What a great summary of the story of the Bible and the human race. Chapter 2, verse 5. Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed.
[10:43] God will give to each person according to what he has done. And in case we think we are somehow different to anyone else, have a look at chapter 3, verse 10.

It makes it abundantly clear. that we are included in this. Chapter 3, verse 10. As it is written, there is no one righteous.
Not even one. There is no one who understands. No one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have together become worthless.
There is no one who does good. Not even one. In fact, we are told in chapter 3, verse 23.
All, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Just as Adam did at the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, so we, his ancestors, have followed on in the same ways.
[11:50] We're all guilty and deserving of God's judgment. That's been the escalating problem as we've read through the story of the Bible. But that's not the only story, is it?

God has also promised to respond in grace and has demonstrated grace time and time again to a rebellious people. So Romans chapter 1, verse 16.
The Apostle Paul, who's writing, he says, I am not ashamed of the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news, the declaration of great news from God.
Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. First for the Jew, and then for the Gentiles.
So for all people, salvation is being offered. Chapter 2, verse 4. Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness?
[12:56] God's tolerance and his patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads us towards repentance. You see, it's telling us that salvation and forgiveness is available through our

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repentance.

repentance. Even though we are guilty, we can be forgiven. And this has been the repeated hope as we've read through the story of the Bible.
As the problem escalates, so the hope also escalates. So on the one hand, as it's summarized here in Romans, God demands justice, which is bad news for us because we're all guilty.
But on the other hand, God offers grace, which is good news for us because we all need it. But if God is fair in his judgment, how can he forgive us if we're guilty?
If God is just and righteous in all that he does, how could God possibly remove punishment that we justly deserve? If God were to forgive us, it would be like turning a blind eye to all our wickedness and sin.
[14:20] God would be seen to be nothing more than some corrupt judge who's open to some kind of bribe or a backhander and who cares little for any kind of justice. It would be like Jimmy in our story that we read at the very beginning, walking away without any sentence at all.

And we'd say, where is the justice in that? How can you just let somebody go free for a crime they've committed? So how can God be both compassionate and gracious while at the same time being righteous and fair?
And this is the big story of the Bible. How is God going to respond to you and to me? Is he going to come in justice? Or is he going to give us grace?
It's a little bit like a tug of war. God is the anchorman on one side for justice, pulling this direction. And God is the anchorman on the other side of grace, pulling in the other direction.
One seems to be pulling against the other. And the human race sits in the middle, in the balance. If justice wins, then what of God's desire to forgive?
[15:37] And if grace wins, what of God's promise to be just? How can God simultaneously express his justice and grace to the world?

Well, the answer to this is the cross of Jesus Christ. God himself dies on the cross, both punishing our sin and providing for our salvation.
It is the solution to the problem or the dilemma that we face. So here's the first big theme of the cross.
The grace of the cross. Salvation provided. Have a look at Romans chapter 3 and verse 23. Romans 3 verse 23. See what it says? For all have sinned, all that you and I, regardless of our nationality or our religion or wherever we come from, we have all sinned and all fall short of the glory of God.
[17:01] And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Now I just want to pick up on that one word there, that word redemption that comes through Christ Jesus.

Redemption in the Bible is all about freeing someone from the threat of death or punishment. So we saw that in the story of Israel.
Do you remember when they were in slavery in Egypt and the angel of death was to pass over and God said, I will redeem you? So that redemption is freeing someone from the threat of death or punishment.
And that's what we see throughout the story of the Bible. We see God coming to redeem people from the punishment they deserve. He's constantly setting people free.
But his redemption is always partial. Because the next time somebody sins or the nation sins, they find themselves under God's judgment again.
[18:08] But now as we come into the climax of the story, we're reading that God has redeemed us fully and finally by his grace. You see, the threat of God's judgment, which is just and fair, hangs over the entire world, over the human race, over all history and all time.

But God has come in his grace and he now removes the deserved judgment from us. Redemption means we are set free.
We are no longer living under the weight of God's justice. As a result, look at verse 24, we are justified freely by his grace through redemption.
We're justified. Justified is another word we need to be clear on. It means though we are guilty before God, we are declared by God to be in the right.
Though we're guilty before God, we are declared by God to be in the right. Now there's something really scandalous and shocking about this.

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[19:23] We should be reading this and going, what? You can't be serious. It doesn't seem right. It doesn't seem fair.

It's like Jimmy in our story being set free from the sentence he deserves. Except in our case, there is absolutely nothing within us that suggests we deserve any grace.
We're rebels who refuse to change our ways. but God in his grace declares us to be right before him. I was at a funeral recently and I was talking to the guy outside, a friend of mine and he said, he said, so what is it?
He said, what is it that you believe? So in the literally the few moments that I had I said, it's all about grace. And I explained something along those lines that God, even though we're guilty before God, we can be declared by God to be in the right.
He says, you can't be serious. He says, that sounds really great. Those were his words because it's like, it can possibly be true but it is true.
[20:41] guilty people are put in the right before God. We are now treated as if we had obeyed God perfectly.

We're now treasured as his own child as if we had never ever disobeyed him in our life. We are declared by God to be not guilty.
No longer waiting a sentence or punishment. We are set free to live with God without shame or fear, standing before him, knowing that we are loved by him and cared for him.
It's true. But how can God do this? What about his justice? Treating somebody who is guilty as an innocent person is very unfair and very unjust.
How can God do it? Well, here's the second part. And we must keep the two together. We dare not divide them.
[21:52] Gone too far. Oh, I'll tell you what it is. The justice of the cross, sin punished.

The justice of the cross, sin punished. That's the second part. Verse 24 of chapter 3. Let's read that again.
We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him, that's Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.
He did this to demonstrate his justice. You see, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is how God deals with our deserved judgment and our desired forgiveness.
When we understand the cross, when we see the tension between God's justice and God's grace, we see that it is settled at the cross so that God remains fair and true to himself and to his character.
[23:04] And the key phrase for us here in verse 25 is sacrifice of atonement. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement.

that's how God deals with our deserved judgment and our desired forgiveness. Now we've come across this before as we've been going through the story of the Bible and every time we come across sacrifice of atonement in the Bible it's always in relation to God's wrath or anger towards his people.
And we find it hard to think of God being angry. We don't like that idea. You see when I get angry it's uncontrolled and it's temper-like.
It could be a fit of rage. But with God his anger is always controlled. It is his reasoned and just response to our sin.
Maybe you've heard this phrase from people. God hates sin but he loves the sinner. You ever heard it? Maybe you've said it.
[24:19] I've said it. God hates sin but he loves the sinner. Well I think it's unhelpful because the Bible makes it very clear that God hates sin and we the sinners must be punished.

And the most uncomfortable truth as we're seeing here is that we're all under God's wrath because our sin is always an offence to God. We can never separate the sin from the sinner.
So if God is angry at sin, if God is angry at the rebellion, then God is angry at me. Now because God is just and he can't ignore sin and pretend it's not there, he must deal with it.
He can't just sweep it under the carpet and go, oh let's just forget about it. And everybody do as they please. That's not the kind of world that God has made. But it's also true that God must be forgiving and he must be kind and compassionate.
That's his character. So at the cross we see the two come together. We see our sin punished and salvation provided.

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[25:34] And how does God do it? Well it's through, as we see in verse 25, the sacrifice of atonement. he presented Jesus.

The God man came into the world and Jesus became the anger absorber for us. Jesus came like one of us, a human being, and he takes my sin and your sin upon himself and so the wrath of God which comes down upon the world is deflected from me and it falls unto Christ on the cross.
Jesus bore the punishment that you and I justly deserve. Do you remember the tug of war? On one side we have God, the anchorman for justice, and on the other side we have God, the anchorman for grace.
Both are attributes of God that can never give way. And so we have this tension with the human race, if you like, in the balance. Is God going to bring justice or is he going to bring grace?
Well what happens is that God steps into the middle. He steps into the middle through his son, Jesus Christ. And as he dies on the cross with his arms outstretched, it's like he spans this great divide.
[27:06] He holds justice in the one hand. And he holds grace in the other hand. And it's as if Christ on the cross pulls them together so that simultaneously our deserved wrath is dealt with, the wrath of God falls on us, and our desired forgiveness reaches out to a broken and dying world.

At the cross, sin is punished and salvation is provided. Now we must understand this.
Sometimes it's portrayed that God is the angry one. You read through the Old Testament, oh God is full of justice. And we get to the New Testament and Jesus is the loving one and he's gracious.
But that's a complete distortion of the truth. As we've seen through the whole story of the Bible, God is both full of wrath and full of love. He is just and forgiving.
He loves sinners and he's angry with sinners. And so when Jesus comes to die on the cross for you and for me, it's not a separate third party, it is God in Christ who dies on the cross for you and for me.
[28:26] God himself comes down as a man and is punished for my sin and provides for my salvation. God that is what he does.

And how can we experience this for ourselves and make this a reality in our own lives? Well again, look at verse 25. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.
The only thing that we bring to the table, the only thing that we can bring to this is our sin, our mess, our rebellion. And in response, have faith and trust in the God-man Jesus Christ who says, I have come to deal with your sin, past, present and future, so that you can stand guilty though you are, as innocent before God, holy, blameless in his sight.
And at the same time, receive that forgiveness, receive that grace, so that we are now treasured as God's children, as if we had never disobeyed, as if we had obeyed God perfectly.
That is how he treats us, that is how he loves us, and that is how it was all achieved at the cross.
And so we respond in faith, trusting in his work, his perfect work for you and for me.
[30:09] You see, this is the climax of the story. This is what all the little stories are all about. As we watch God's action through it all, we see him bringing grace, we see him bringing his justice, and it's all pointing forward to this one event, as Jesus dies.

At the cross, justice and grace are demonstrated in all its fullness. That's why when Jesus died on the cross, he says, it is finished.
It's all over. God has been satisfied with the work that he has done. There is nothing more for us to do. There is no more fear of his justice, no more fear of his judgment.
We can stand as his child. welcomed into his presence. This is a once and for all event, where God both punishes sin and provides for salvation.
It's at the cross where wrath and mercy meet, and justice and grace flow to a needy world. at the cross is where we need to live our lives daily, in remembrance of all that he has done and remembrance of who we are, welcomed and treasured as his children.
[31:41] Let's pray together. tomorrow, and as who areangled,

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