

Sin and the Domain of Darkness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 October 2022

Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] Good morning, church family. As Dave said, there's two readings. The first one is from John 3, starting at verse 16, which is so familiar to many of us. So John chapter 3.

Starting at verse 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only son of God.

And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. Now we're going to turn to our second reading, which is in Colossians chapter 1, starting at verse 9.

[1 : 29] Colossians 1 verse 9. So this letter is Paul's prayer for the Christian believers. And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to sharing the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So we're starting a new series today. As we went through Colossians last term, the elders thought there was just some key words, key concepts that just carried this whole weight of Bible truth in them that we didn't have time to pause and just look at these weighty words and understand the depth of them.

So we're going to spend four weeks going back into Colossians, kind of using Colossians as a launching point into four key words, all about salvation. So this morning we will look at how bad the problem is.

We're looking at the word sin and Colossians talks about the domain of darkness. Can I urge you to listen to the whole series?

[3 : 26] Today's kind of the bad news. There's good news. Please come next week. If you can't be here, then catch up on the sermons online.

But next week we will look at how Jesus saves. We're going to look at the ideas of redemption and forgiveness. Then we're going to look at the effects of salvation, justification and peace, how a legal and relational standing with God is changed.

And then finally we're going to look at what living a safe life essentially consists of, being united to Christ and having communion with him. So that's where we're headed.

Part of the goal of this series is we need to reclaim back to Bible understanding how our culture uses some of these words.

So we use the word redemption as if someone can redeem themselves by their own achievements out of any sense of shame or something. They can redeem themselves if they do.

[4 : 31] That's not the biblical idea. We need to understand what God says redemption is. Or forgiveness. We talk about forgiveness today as if it's some psychological reason for doing it, that I need to take back control, not let the other person control me any longer.

It's almost lost its relational meaning today. Or today's word on sin. Today in our culture people might use it when they buy one of those thick shakes that's just covered in chocolate syrup and 14 Cadbury flakes are just poking out of it every direction and just like a sinful pleasure.

Maybe we use it like that. Or the other extreme is if you call any behaviour a sin wrong, you're intolerant. You're bigoted.

It's like the only sin is calling something a sin. So we need to understand what sin means because we're lost in our culture today.

But these key words of salvation, sin and redemption, forgiveness, justification, peace, union with Christ, they are so crucial to knowing God.

[5 : 48] They're crucial to understanding people and the brokenness in our world. They are crucial to possessing eternal life ourselves and they're crucial for seeking life for other people.

So I hope you look forward to this series and really this series is going to be scratching the surface as well. We're always going deeper in understanding this.

Well first I think we need to ask the question salvation from what exactly? You've probably been reading the news and this year is the 20th anniversary of the Bali bombings that killed over 200 people, 88 Australians included.

And that's not to mention those who survived and had painful skin grafts and painful physiotherapy and the pain of survivors' guilt.

And I was listening to the Triple J hack program and a survivor named Mitch was being interviewed and he was asked how he felt about one of the bombers is, it looks like, about to be released on parole having been rehabilitated.

[7 : 06] And he was asked has justice been served? He said it made his blood boil. This guy who tore families apart is about to be free. It made his blood boil.

He said it wasn't about rehabilitation. He deserves punishment. He even said of other bombers who have been judicially executed for their crimes, he said they got off lightly.

Others had to suffer. They didn't have such a swift and humane death. They got off lightly. It's heavy, isn't it?

All the talk today of live and let live, of tolerance, as if there's no moral code in the fabric of the universe, but there's still plenty of talk of justice.

It isn't just justice ingrained in us as human beings. I've never met anyone who doesn't care about justice. A fair and unfair, being proud and ashamed, right and wrong.

[8 : 14] We all want good to triumph over evil. Even as a culture today, why else would the Marvel Avengers series be so popular?

We want good to triumph. Why do teenagers read thousands of pages of Harry Potter? How do you get a teenager to read that much? Because we want good to triumph over evil.

We care about justice. And Christianity has a coherent reason why we care about justice so much. It's because there's a moral character who created this world, who created us in his image to be moral agents. There's that beating heart behind this world.

Those Bali bombers will stand before their maker, their moral maker, one day. And they will receive final, eternal, divine justice.

[9 : 17] The Bible warns, it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. I wouldn't want to be them on that final day of judgment.

Now there's more to salvation that we're going to hear about next week and in particular when we look at the idea of redemption. But the Bible talks about the main thing people need salvation from is this eternal, final, divine justice of God, of our maker.

So who else? Who else, besides these Bali bombers, is in danger of God's final justice and why?

Well, throughout the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the most common word to use to describe the human problem is sin.

And remembering that sin is not some indulgent pleasure, nor is it reserved just for the worst criminals. Sin has a meaning along the lines of failing to hit the mark or falling short of the standard. I think we can all easily understand this concept of falling short of the standard. Just think about your own standards for yourself that you've made up.

[10 : 51] Are you the character, are you the person you want to be? I pause there because I don't think we like to pause and ask that question, do we?

It's an uncomfortable question. Our inner lawyer might quickly try and justify ourselves by thinking morality is on a bell curve that, kind of like school grades where there are just the worst of the worst like the Bali bombers down one end and yes, there's a few exceptions.

There's some truly altruistic people out there but the majority are shades of grey. We're somewhere in between. As long as we're in that bell curve, we're good people, right?

Maybe if we're ahead of most, we should be pretty safe. We're good people, aren't we? But that horizontal comparison isn't justice and we all know it.

This one exam at uni, the majority of the class failed the exam and I was one of them and all the students were just fuming at the teacher that he'd set the exam too hard.

[12 : 09] But he didn't test us on anything that we hadn't covered in the course. The test might have been hard but we just all failed.

That's just what happened. We would rather be outraged at the teacher than to admit I failed. I fell short.

Comparing ourselves, it doesn't justify as much as we try to make it justify ourselves. God is just. He has one standard for all people.

His character is the standard. Don't compare yourself to other people. That is a twisted guide to whether you're a good person or not.

When God is our standard, we have a right measure of ourselves, his character. And this isn't some arbitrary standard. When we don't share in God's character, it causes real damage to real people.

[13 : 10] It causes real damage to the world and animals that we're meant to be taken care of. And it robs God of the honour he deserves. It causes real damage.

Just consider our closest relationships. Why are relationships so hard to maintain? Why is trust, full trust, so hard to maintain and it's broken so quickly?

Why is full intimacy, even in our closest relationships, so hard to keep? why, if we're all good people? And we also have to take into account, that's just the horizontal relationships, how are we relating to God?

Our words and our actions to God, do our lips give him the praise he deserves for his power and his goodness? goodness. When he speaks in his word, do we listen carefully?

When we know his commands, do we obey gladly? We've got to consider how we relate to God too. So who else is in danger of divine justice?

[14 : 27] Here's God's conclusion in Romans 3. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, of the character of God.

Evil words and evil acts, it's universal. And for those who misunderstand and distort Christianity, they think that the religious remedy is something like how one of my friends, when we say goodbye to each other, I'll see you later, and they respond, make good choices.

It's kind of funny, it's a nice way to say goodbye, but some people think that's what Christianity is about, just make good choices, at least try to make good choices, and God will see your good intentions.

But to think that God wants us to work harder, to be just more religiously fervent, to make better choices, that ignores God's diagnosis of the problem, of where this evil acts are coming from.

If we're going to understand where our evil acts are coming from, we need to understand the cause, and we need God to tell us. We can't just work it out by observing how people behave.

[15 : 52] We need God to tell us, and he has told us what's going on. When the Lord scans what's happening inside of us as human beings, when he looks at our mind and our heart, and by heart the Bible means the control centre of our being, when the Lord scans us, like a medical scan, the radiation just lights up like a Christmas tree.

The sickness is so deep, it has gone even to our heart, our innermost desires and our thoughts. I find Genesis 6, verse 5, in the days of Noah, one of the most sobering descriptions of the human condition.

I even just bent my legs because I just felt, it is a weighty verse. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. We see this in our John 3 passage that was read today.

So, starting at verse 19, this is God's judgement, the light came into the world, the light, not a light, but the light, the son of God, the spotless, perfect, son of God, who's truly innocent.

[17:41] He came into the world. And we would expect the next bit to say, and people flocked to him. The light came and people came to him for truth. They came to him for forgiveness.

They came to him for restored a relationship with God and eternal life. But that's not what the verse says. The light has come into the world and people loved the darkness.

loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest their works should be exposed. Our very nature is rotten. We love what we should hate and we hate what we should love. Now, when the Bible says that we're kind of rotten even to our heart, it's not saying we're as bad as we possibly could be.

There's lots of reasons that we don't follow through with our desires of the heart. We're not as bad as we possibly could be and thank God for that.

[18:49] But if the condition isn't all the way to our heart, then why would things that tempt us to do what we know is wrong, why would we find them tempting?

Why would we find them appealing at all and be drawn away by them? If we hated it, even though I know it's wrong, if we hated it, we would despise it and not go anywhere near it.

But we're not, or if you're anything like me, we're drawn to it. Why do we find it so tempting and get allured? I've got to admit that something in me loves it.

even though I know it's wrong. Something in me loves it. I want to give an example of this and that's always dangerous, but this is just one concrete example to illustrate.

Recently, there was this material possession that I was just obsessed with and I wanted it. I really wanted it. Emma thought it was just a bad idea and she kept telling me that.

[19:57] I didn't listen to her. I just wanted it and we went away on holidays even and I was researching about it and it ruined the holiday because I just wanted this thing and I didn't have it and my mind just kept going to it instead of being present and just relaxing.

It ruined my holiday. Not to mention whatever non-attention I gave to Emma and Sam, but I was just obsessed. Now, the problem there wasn't just, I couldn't, in my head I was telling myself choose something else, stop thinking about it.

That didn't work. Why? Because I think my heart loved it. I found it appealing. I wanted it. I coveted it is the biblical word for it. The condition there was a problem with my love of my heart.

I needed to love something else more. Now, that description, do you find that evil? Is evil really the right word for that?

Darkness that Colossians uses, the domain of darkness, the rule of something ruling you, domain is about rule, it's about jurisdiction, something like coveting some material possession, is that darkness?

[21:22] compared to Bali bombers, are we going to call that darkness? Well, what is darkness? I think when the Bible talks about darkness, it's not living according to the truth.

It's not living in light of the truth. And if we just stick with the coveting example, people, it's totally at odds with reality.

It's as if this thing will give me life and security and meaning and value, if I had it, rather than God. The Bible uses the word idolatry.

We look to everything else besides God to give us life and blessing. That's just not true. It's not how God created the world.

I was obsessing about it as if I could bring it about. That's not true. I'm not in control. God decides what happens. Even that's not true.

[22:24] It's not even true to the level of what life is essentially about. It's not about gain. it's about gift. God created this world as a gift for us to know him at the centre.

Do you see how that coveting is in darkness. It is not according to truth. God isn't at the centre. Our heart is ruled by what we think will give us life and if it's anything other than God, then we are ruled by darkness.

It is controlling our heart and that's why those evil words and evil choices flow out of that heart.

There's another level we can go here.

We've got our evil words and behaviour which is flowing out of a heart that isn't looking to God for life or to anything else.

sin. There's something fundamental about what sin is. There's a fundamental lie that we have all believed. This lie was at the beginning, the first human beings.

[23 : 44] It is the lie that you can be like God. God. I'm going to borrow from theologian and author J.I.

Packer. Here's how he defines sin. Here's how he defines the root issue of sin. What is the essence of sin?

Playing God and as a means to this, refusing to allow the creator to be God as far as you are concerned, living not for him before yourself, loving and serving and pleasing yourself without reference to the creator, trying to be as far as possible independent of him, taking yourself out of his hands, holding him at arm's length, keeping the reins of life in your own hands, acting as if you and your pleasure were the end to which all else, God included, must be made to function as a means. That is the attitude in which sin essentially consists. He's just describing there that lie we've all taken in, that we can be God, that we can control our lives, that we can determine what will bless our lives.

It's playing God. God. This idea of being in control, of playing God, I think explains why a very religious person, very religious person, is still fundamentally sick in the heart.

[25 : 33] God. Because trying to prove yourself to God, for him to approve of you based on what you have done, is really saying to God, you owe me.

I jumped through all your hoops, I did the prayers, I did the giving of money, I listened to countless sermons, I did the pilgrimage, I did the meditation, now you owe me.

You can't ask any more from me. Give me what I deserve. Can you hear how that is still trying to keep control?

It's still seeking blessing outside of God as well. Not seeing God himself as the blessing, but as a means to the blessing.

If I do what you tell me to do, God, then you owe me. It's trying to stay in control. The religious attempt at playing God is as much in darkness as someone who just brazenly is self-centred.

[26 : 44] The difference is you're religiously self-centred. So who is in danger of God's divine justice and why?

All who have a sick heart, who think they can play God, stay in control of their lives, who then their heart is driven by idolatry, seeking blessing outside of God rather than seeing God himself as the source of life.

And that expressing itself in damaging words and damaging acts. which is me, which is you, according to scripture.

We need forgiveness for our wrong words and behaviour, but we also need a heart transplant. We need a fundamental change. A heart not ruled by love of self, but ruled by the love of God.

God. Despite all of our evil, John 3.16, for God so loved the world.

[28 : 10] God so loved the world that he gave his only son, his only son to bear that divine final judgment on himself when he breathed his last breath nailed to that cross.

That is extravagant love, is it not? That God would love us so much. God would love us so much. How will you respond to that light, the light?

Because it confronts us. It should have two effects on us. I hope it has two effects, not just one.

Pastor Tim Keller describes these two effects really well.

When you see that God's son died on the cross to save you from God's justice, Tim Keller says this. It tells us, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dare believe.

Yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. God's son's God's son's light.

[30 : 00] God the father calls you to his son's light. Don't be afraid of your deeds being exposed. You will be exposed. In the light of the cross, we see our sin more clearly.

You will be exposed, but you don't need to be afraid of that because the father has poured all the justice on his son. It's not condemnation you'll receive. It's salvation.

All he's got left to give you is the love he has for his son. Openly confess your evil behaviour and your heart that loves everything else besides God and come and just rejoice that the Father has poured all his divine justice on his son and not you because he so loved you.

If you stay hiding in the darkness, whether religiously or just living a self-centred life, it's not just the Bali bombers who should be terrified at falling into the hands of the living God.

Come into the light of the cross. And you'll have all the guilt and shame washed away in the embrace of a father who just wants you to know him as an affectionate father.

[31 : 27] Come into his light. Can I give you a minute just to do whatever you want in your own minds and hearts, whether that's praising God.

If you're a Christian, just praising God afresh for his extravagant love for you or whether you've been convicted by Scripture today. Do whatever you want in your own mind and heart and then I'll pray after a minute.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Speaker 5 shining 7 Yea." Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father, help each one of us to come to you as we are, to be humbled and exposed by the light of your cross.

And then, Lord, I pray that you might fill us each with a profound sense of thankfulness for your pure grace and love that would even give your own son to make us wretches, your sons and daughters.

[33 : 46] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.