

What Is Wrong With Us

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[0 : 00] Because we need light. And we ask that in the darkness of our world and in the darkness of our lives, the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ may shine into our hearts.

In his name, amen. Amen. Amen.

It's a great delight to see you all here. I hope you've taken great delight in seeing one another and doing all you can to make room for one another. The service begins at St. Chad's in about 10 minutes, if any of you would like to go down there.

It's at the corner of Trafalgar and 24th. And Ernie Eldridge would be glad to see you. This is a singular opportunity that comes on Christmas Eve to share with you the gospel of Jesus Christ. And with the longing and the desire that that gospel may shine into your life and into your heart.

[1 : 38] And, you know, psychiatrists generally go into psychiatry because they have mental problems. And doctors go into medicine because they don't want to die.

And ministers go into the ministry because they're afraid of hell. And I've made, you know, again, as I sort of try and think through the passage for tonight, come to that great discovery that I really know now what's wrong with this church.

It's me. Now, I'd like you to tell me what you think is wrong with this church in the same words.

You see the point? I can't say it for you, but you could say it, you know. It's me. And you would be right.

It's preferable to us, by reason of our human arrogance and pride and self-sufficiency, to suspect that it's somebody else. And if anybody wanted to invite a question, it would be, you know, most of us would be able to tell at least some of the problems of the church with other people.

[3 : 12] And when I tell you that, I'm really quoting from G.K. Chesterton, who made the great statement that if you want to know what's wrong with the world, it's me.

And the great advantage of coming to that recognition is that the problems of the whole world are suddenly within the scope of those things about which you personally can do something.

If it's somebody else or something else or somewhere else, well, what can you do? But if you discover that it's you, then perhaps there's something that can be done.

Now, to say what is wrong with me, I must tell you that the answer is that I am a sinner.

That is, my life is not God-centered. My life is self-centered. And that's what sin means. Now, sin, as you know, is a very unpopular word.

[4 : 24] And so, in the euphemisms of modern language, we find other ways of describing it. And there's a wonderful book that I've just come across that has a new and quite acceptable word for sin with which we can identify quite easily.

And this word is addiction. Now, let me suggest to you that you need to participate in this sermon by getting out a piece of paper and writing down on it what your besetting sins are.

But don't put down sins because you don't like the word any better than I do. But you could put down what your addictions are. And I have a list of them here. As among those that you might consider, we probably have almost as many addictions going in this congregation as we have people.

But among the addictions that we have, there is anger. There is finger drumming. There is sex, soft drinks, strong drinks, stress, sunbathing, golf, and the stock market.

Now, it could go on endlessly from there, but it's that kind of thing that I think is sin.

[5 : 58] This addiction to these things. There are apparently others like hair twisting, drugs, eating, furniture, golf, and...

Oh, yeah. I don't want anybody to take that personally. And gossiping.

There are addictions of aversion. And these addictions of aversion are for things like airplanes, mice, snakes, anchovies, and dentists, and people, and food. And people develop addictions of aversion against all those things. In this list of addictions, I came across those which really apply mostly, I think, to clergymen.

And these are the addictions to clergymen, which I, like me, which I recognized right away. An addiction to... You can write this down if you want.

[7 : 16] Being good, being helpful, being loved, being nice, and being right. And... And...

And... That... Now, to tell you something, you may think that all these are fairly harmless, you know, and that we might get onto hard drugs or alcohol and spend the time on that.

But these addictions that I'm talking about are the way in which sin manifests itself in your life and in mine, in what appears to be perfectly harmless activities.

But then the same man who wrote down these lists said that this is what addiction is. Any compulsive human behavior that limits the freedom of human desire.

Want to try that one again? Any compulsive human behavior that limits the freedom of human desire. That addiction is attachment.

[8 : 34] The nailing of desire to different objects. So that you suddenly come around, you see, to what Paul is saying in Romans chapter 7.

About the fact that to will what is good is in me. But to do it is not in me. The good that I want to do, I never do.

And you see, what the psychiatrist says about it... Now, Paul says something, I think, even more profound. But what the psychiatrist says is relevant and very contemporary.

What the psychiatrist says about addiction is that our addiction is meant to find its expression in, not a desire for those things to which we are addicted, but a desire for God.

And that the desire for God, which belongs to you and to me, is frittered away in our addiction to these other things.

[9 : 50] That's why our life has, you know, why something needs to be done. Now, what possibly could be done to deal with this problem, that the desire for God, which is meant to consume us entirely, that we would be attached to God, that we would be nailed to God, that we would be totally addicted to God.

What is it that happens that could bring that about in our lives? Instead of our life being frittered away in the addictions, which rob us of the desire for God that we need.

Well, if you look at the passage which Fran read tonight, the very beginning of it in Titus chapter 2 and verse 11, there's a very simple verse there.

And it says this, The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all. Now, what that means is that caught in our addictions, that the grace of God has appeared.

Now, that word appeared is a word which some and perhaps all of you know as the word epiphany, the light that comes into the darkness.

[11 : 36] The grace of God has had its epiphany. And what is this epiphany of the grace of God?

It is salvation for all men, salvation for all women, salvation for all people. That's what's happened. That this light has come into our world. This salvation has come in the birth of Jesus Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection.

So, the grace of God has appeared to all. That's what it sounds like it says, doesn't it? But it doesn't say that. In fact, it says, The grace of God that brings salvation to all men, to all people, has appeared.

In other words, this thing has happened with the birth of Jesus Christ. It has appeared. Now, it hasn't yet appeared to all men and women, but it has, that what has happened applies to all men and women.

[13 : 01] So that it is the grace of God that brings salvation to all has appeared. Now, the point of that is that has it appeared to you?

Has it appeared to you in the way that this thing that brings salvation from our addictions, from our attachments, which don't allow us to enter into a relationship to God, has this happened to you?

That's what needs to happen. And that's the question that is raised by the verse. Has it happened to you? You need, and I need, an epiphany, an appearing of the grace of God that brings salvation in our lives.

And if you identify yourself and identify your addictions and see how your life is being consumed with these, when you are meant to have a desire for God, you'll see the need for the grace of God that brings salvation to appear to you.

Now, what salvation is, is the thing that is stronger than we are. Because the source of it is in someone who is stronger than we are.

[14 : 34] You can go to work on your addictions, you can identify them, and you can get them, and you can break them. But they'll bend, but they won't break. You can apply your willpower, and you can apply your reason, and you can apply anything you want, but you won't break them.

Because that's the nature of them. The attachment is there, and it doesn't break. And so what you need is someone who can bring to you salvation to allow that break to take place.

You know, we think that alcoholics have trouble being addicted to alcohol, but, you know, it's addiction of any kind has this quality about it. We need the grace of God that brings salvation to appear in the circumstances of our lives to break the addictions which consume us, and mean that we are attached to something that is not fulfilling our desire or God's purpose.

And so that's what's taken place. Salvation is the strength which is stronger than you, and it can do for you what you cannot do for yourself, so that you accept salvation as a gift from God.

And what happens is that in that salvation, God pours his love and his healing and his reconciling into your life.

[16 : 09] And he has his desire on you that you might be free to have your desire for him, for God, fulfilled.

There's only one thing left, you know, to tell you, and then I will leave it with you. Where are you going to encounter this epiphany that you require?

The grace of God that brings salvation for all has appeared, but it hasn't appeared to all, and it may need yet to appear to you, and you may need to find your epiphany.

where what happened in the coming of the light into darkness might happen to you in the personal circumstances of your life.

Do you want to know where it comes from? This is great. I mean, you're in the most opportune place in the world to discover this, because Paul says where it comes from.

[17 : 23] it comes, Paul says, at the proper time it's manifested through his word, through the preaching with which I have been entrusted.

The function of the preacher is to hold before you the fact of salvation, that the grace of God, which brings salvation, might break into your life. That's what it's about.

That's what we're doing right here, right now. That you see in the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you see in him the grace of God that brings salvation, breaking into your world, that there is an epiphany for you, breaking into your world, of the grace of God that brings salvation.

And that salvation is that stronger one who can break what you can't break, who can set you free from the attachments, so as you may be free to serve and love God.

Do you see what it says here in this passage? It says the grace of God that has appeared to all.

Sorry. The grace of God that brings salvation to all has appeared, and it's that breaking in of that grace that trains us to renounce your religion and worldly passions to live sober, upright, and godly life in this present world.

[19 : 22] This is a cough, not an addiction, right? You see that that's what happens when the grace of God which brings salvation breaks into your heart.

And so when you come and put your hands out to receive the bread and the wine tonight, you are asked in a sense for that which represents the grace of God that brings salvation, the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.

You're asking for that salvation to come into your life. But your hands may be so full of your addictions there is no room to receive it.

And the prayer for you and for me, me for you and you for me and us for one another is that in fact this grace of God that brings salvation may indeed bring salvation, the power which you have in God to break what you can't break to bring that salvation into your life in Jesus Christ.

And that in the darkness of this night and perhaps in the darkness of the circumstances of your own life, this can happen as you partake tonight of the communion, even as you listen to the proclamation of this good news of God's grace breaking into our world.

[21 : 13] Amen.