New Hope - GOOD FRIDAY

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] George Herbert Wells, known as H.G. Wells in all of history, was an English writer popular at the end of the 19th century through 20th century.

He was prolific in many genres. He wrote more than 50 novels and dozens of short stories. He was someone who started life sympathetic towards God and religion, but ended life self-confessing as an atheist.
He started life as someone who was hopeful, particularly hopeful that humanity would eventually solve all of its problems, but ended life despondent and in fact, really near the end of his life, declaring that he was close to suicide.
We see this transition for him in his short history of the world. He wrote, What an optimistic view of humanity in 1937.
Nine years later, after the awful carnage of World War II and just before he died, he wrote this in his final work, The cold-blooded massacres of the defenceless, the return of deliberate and organised torture, mental torment and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished, has come near to breaking my spirit altogether.
[2:08] It's hard to avoid the conclusion that there is something fundamentally wrong with our world.

If you have not yet come to that conclusion, there's nothing I can do for you, I'm afraid. Every worldview and philosophy from Christianity through to secular atheism has to come to terms with that issue.
What is fundamentally wrong with our world? H.G. Wells goes from a person of hope to hopelessness. Christianity, on the other hand, goes from hopelessness to hope.
These days, what we tend to do in struggling with the difficulty of our world is we have a tendency to look outside of ourselves and we tend to blame the world's issues on institutions, on governments, on other people, on particular races, on lack of education, religion itself.
According to the Christian faith, it's been mentioned multiple times, we've just sung about it multiple times, the problem is sin. It's not outside of ourselves, it's something that's inside of us.
[3:41] It's a concept that is often viewed as ludicrous today and even offensive. And although Christianity declares that sin is the big problem, it also reveals the solution, which in turn gives us a new hope as we navigate this life with all its ups and downs.

So there's three things I want to get to this morning from those Bible passages that Aidan read out to us. What is this problem? What's the new solution to it? And what is this new hope?
So first of all, the old problem. The first three verses of Ephesians 1, which were just read out to us, are a comprehensive panoramic picture of the human condition outside of God.
We are dead in transgressions and sins. That's pretty devastating for the human condition. Death in Ephesians 1 is not a figure of speech.
These people that are referred to here are dead. He's not describing here some decadent, depraved segment of society.
[4:57] He's describing all of humanity from top to bottom. What is sin? This thing that is leading to death of all of humanity.

It's a whole lot more than just breaking some moral code, which is the common view nowadays. It's just breaking a moral code. The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard saw it as a despairing refusal to find our deepest identity in our relationship and service to God.
The God who made us. Another way of putting that is it is creating an identity for ourselves apart from our creator.

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Another way of putting that, in the words of 5th century philosopher and theologian, St. Augustine, sin is not just doing bad things, it's making good things into ultimate things.
Whatever those things are that we get our identity from, they are not God. And that will mean, according to Augustine, will ultimately enslave us, because those things can never be God for us.
[6:24] They can never, ever satisfy the deepest longing of the heart. And so look back there in Ephesians chapter 1. Notice the words followed.

It's used in verses 2 and verse 3. That word followed there, which is used in verse 2 and 3, comes from a word that means mastered by.
To be controlled by. The reason the writer of the Ephesians here describes these people as dead in transgression and sin is that they are helpless.
They are controlled. They're as helpless as a dead body. Completely controlled. Totally mastered. Unable to move or to act on their own.
And the key idea is, verse 3, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. The term our flesh in verse 3 doesn't mean, you know, this stuff.
[7:43] Human flesh and bones. It's referring to self-centered human nature. The things that drive us, master us, control us. According to the Bible, according to the Christian faith, the reason we are slaves to sin is because the human heart is profoundly self-centered.

Profoundly self-centered. The 16th century church reformer and theologian, Martin Luther, put the condition of the human heart quite succinctly. He described it as curved in on itself.
Curved in on itself. Absorbed in itself. Looking into itself. Self-centered. That is what it means to be human apart from God.
Luther said that our nature is so deeply curved in on itself. He described it as wickedly, curvedly and viciously seeks to use all things, even God himself, for our own sake.
Our hearts and our minds are constantly analyzing every person, every object, every interaction, every event, every setting.
[9:16] Constantly analyzing what is in this for me. And when we don't get what we want, we get angry and we blame it on someone else.

Everything is being analyzed by how it benefits my happiness, my glory, my reputation, my comfort, my control of things.
How does it help me? How does it fit with my interests? How does this make me happy? And everyone else who does not provide the filling up of my sense of self, I have to tear them down.
It's obvious to most of us that self-centeredness can make you a pretty cruel person. You know, look at history and all the tyrants of the world.
More often though, self-centeredness makes you a moral person. More often than not, self-centeredness will make you into a good person. If everything is about my need to feel good about myself, then there is no better way for me to feel good about myself than to be a good and moral person.
[10:34] Self-centeredness drives most people into being good, trying hard to serve the needy, being a good child to parents and even being a good parent to my children.

A good friend who assists whenever I am asked. And what lies beneath is a self-centeredness where ultimately I'm doing it for myself.
I'm helping for my sake. I want my kids to be compliant for my sake. We do good things to be noticed by people to receive the applause of others.
It's so we can feel like we've got a meaningful life and feel like a good person. Now I suspect most of you would remember one of the greatest Hollywood classics of the last century, the movie Rocky, starring Sylvester Stallone.
He's an underrated actor who should have won an Academy Award by now. His love interest in the movie asked him, Rocky, why are you fighting the world champion?
[11:54] It was a spectacle fight that he was not meant to win. Why are you fighting the world champion? And his reply was profound for Sylvester Stallone.

I just want to go the distance and then I'll know I'm not a bum. Deep down inside, if we ever allow ourselves to go there and I would invite you to go there this Good Friday, we all feel like bums. we're all trying to do something to convince the world and ourselves that we are good and that we are worthy. Yeah, sure, self-centeredness can make you into a tyrant, but self-centeredness can make you a really good and moral person.

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But self-centeredness and beware of this of those who are gathering online and here to now, self-centeredness can also make you a very religious person. We can devote ourselves to obeying God and turning up to church and reading the Bible and praying and giving, doing the sorts of things that we're doing now, all good and right things to do.
But how do I know when I'm doing it all for me? One of the answers to that is you just do the bare minimum to make you feel good about yourself.
[13:21] And when things aren't going well in your life, you start pulling away from those good things. And it's because we're doing these things to use God.

We do good things and expect God to come through for us in the ways that we want him to. And so when things aren't going well, he doesn't appear to be coming through in the way we want him to. Well, then we start pulling back.
And that means it's all about us. Just trying to paint a picture here that self-centeredness clings to every single thing in our lives. Verse 3 uses the word craving to describe it.
It's a word in the original language means an inordinate desire. It means that our egos are so, so addictive.
It means that we are living for our own glory. It means that we will never be enough. No amount of praise will ever be enough.
[14:27] Our hearts and our minds are in overdrive, running evaluations consistently about no amount of glory, no amount of acclaim, no amount of recognition, no amount of comfort, no amount of good experiences, no amount of material possessions will ever, ever be enough.

No amount of cocaine is ever enough for an addict. It's addictive. Our egos are so addictive, but they're never satisfied.
And it makes us miserable. I think it's profound that wealthy countries in the West have a lower, lower, lower satisfaction in life than the poor people of Bangladesh.
That is profound. C.S. Lewis, the Oxford professor, wrote that there is nothing more enslaving and miserable than self-centeredness. He wrote that it is a hell begun in us that will eventually take us to hell.
That is what he's saying. There is a desire to live for ourselves will ultimately be handed over to us forever. The framework that every human being begins with without Jesus is that you, God, give your life for me.
[16:00] You, people, give your life for me because it's ultimately about me. The Bible's view of sin is that every part of the human condition is tainted.

The consequence at the end of verse 3 is so shocking to our modern context that assumes that we can just do whatever we like without any consequences.
We are not only dead in our sin but we're also condemned. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.
The concept of wrath is so offensive in our day and age and yet the Bible's concept of God's anger is not like your anger where you are just ticked off.
It's not like my anger where I just get ticked off with someone. God's anger is not a bad temper. It is not spite. It is not malice. It is not animosity.
[17:06] It is not revenge. It's not arbitrary. It is not governed by mood. It's not governed by whim. It is God's personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil, to injustice, and sin.

It is his settled refusal to compromise with it and his resolution to condemn it. And it's this wrath that we need rescuing from.
And that is what makes this good day, Good Friday, a great day. The amazing news of Good Friday and Christianity is simple but is profound and that we have a substitute who has stood in for us.
It's a substitute who has rescued. God has done something amazing in Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 3, verse 18, which Aidan read out to us, puts it so succinctly, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.
Ephesians 2 unpacks the implications for us. Because of his great love for us, talking about Jesus on the cross, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we're dead in transgressions.
[18:34] It is by grace you've been saved and God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Verse 6 says that God has raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms.

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Now this was first of all written into the first century Middle Eastern context. It was the Roman world and in the Roman world the conquering warrior who returned from a great victory was given the greatest place of honour upon their return to the capital.
And the greatest place of honour on return to the capital was they were seated at the right hand of the Caesar for all people to see.
This man is to be greatly honoured. Jesus died, was raised again and given the place of greatest honour. The seat at the throat right hand of God in the heavenly realms it is the most honourable seat in the universe.
And verse 6 tells us verse 6 is a past tense. It's saying that the Christian is already seated there with Jesus. Legally seated there with Jesus.
[19:58] When we trust in Jesus Christ all our sins all our self-centeredness is so hidden so covered so forgiven that we are treated as if we have done everything that Jesus has done.

That is astonishing. Through Jesus and his achievement on the cross God delights and honours and accepts and rejoices over us in the way that he outdoes his own son.
how can that be when we have been so self-centered when we've treated him so badly verse 7 is the key he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
kindness the word kindness is a lot more than the we would generally say he's a kind person it's not it's a lot it actually means costly action the first three verses tells us the essence of sin is putting ourselves where only God should be the centre of our lives on the throne of our lives in control of our lives sin is us putting ourselves where only God deserves to be salvation is God putting himself where only we deserve to be dying because of our sin and that is what Good Friday is all about Jesus Christ took the just punishment from God that we deserve by putting ourselves in the place where only God belongs at the centre of our lives I'll say it again one person has put it really succinctly the essence of sin is us substituting ourselves for God while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us that is what
Good Friday is all about Jesus saved us by doing the absolute opposite of us he saved us through the most radically unselfish thing anyone has ever done though equal with God the Father he emptied himself of his glory he came down and took the place of a servant he traded his life for ours and the contrast in these verses in Ephesians 2 is startling the very next words after telling us in verse 3 that we are deserving of God's wrath we read but because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved the God who is rich in mercy has intervened our condition was hopeless but God intervened in grace from hell to heaven bondage to freedom gloom to light despair to hope wrath to glory death to life that is the greatness of Good
[23:21] Friday the glory of Good Friday his selflessness has overcome our selfishness and when we see him doing that his mercy his love his grace then it finally helps us to see that our sense of self our egos are finally filled up by him we have all the acclaim in Jesus all the honour all the approval all the acceptance we could ever want the Christian faith declares paradoxically that we are more sinful and flawed than we ever realise and more loved and accepted than we could possibly imagine or dream at exactly the same time and so therefore Good Friday is about this new hope a whole new life and this is what this life brings us into verse 8 for it is by grace you've been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves this is a gift from God not by work so that no one can boast for we are God's handiwork created in

Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do his salvation is a gift the new life is a gift hope is a gift and once we get this gift we start seeing everything in life as a gift the life that God wants us to have is a life where we see everything as a gift a Christian therefore is a person who's at rest they're characterised by what verse 9 says no longer boasting the Christian life brings an end to placing confidence in our fickle personal hope everything every single one is looking around for something to boast in to have a confidence in to have a trust in to rest in to face life something that will help them face the complexities of life for H.G.
Wells it was the hope of humanity and science and other things to eventually educate humanity in such a way that we will improve our lives for future generations what is it that you put your hope in some of us look to careers some to our salary some to moral decency some to religious performance a life a life looking for things to boast in is a life of scrambling constantly for identity scrambling for self worth and it is exhausting the new life that God offers us is a gift and because it

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is a gift from God we are set free liberated from trying to find a boast a confidence from within ourselves to pin our hopes on verse 10 is a wonderful vision of this new life we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do
God's handiwork his artwork his masterpiece no longer dead but remade and set free to do good works without the constant calculation of whether I've done enough to get the applause that I so desperately desire God's greatest masterpiece is not the Swiss Alps or the vastness of the depths of the ocean God's greatest masterpiece is humanity saved from condemnation made alive set free from slavery set free to serve and love with free abandon and the message of good Friday is that whatever you've done whatever you've become Jesus is your substitute so that you might have new life and a new hope in him and so I want to encourage you this day to make this good
Friday the day that you come to Jesus and experience his grace his mercy his love make this the day you go from hell to heaven from bondage to freedom from gloom to light from despair to hope from wrath to glory from death to life the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us this is the glory of good Friday and it is the hope of humanity in reality you

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