

# The Cross and the Message of Propitiation

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back now to that passage of scripture we read to the first epistle of John chapter number four and we can read at verse number 10 taken in the previous verses from verse seven but let's read verse 10 and this is love not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent a son to be the propitiation for our sins and so on.

When we met last Lord's Day we were looking at Paul's second letter to Corinthians and chapter five and I made it clear that morning that we are going to be looking at some of the benefits of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and to do so to kind of build up a picture of the significance of the cross for our own personal experience and not only to be informed by what the Bible says about the cross, but to learn to appreciate the great need that we have of the finished work of the Lord Jesus and we saw the way in which God reconciles us to himself by making Jesus the one in you know sin to be sin and that we those who do not know righteousness become the righteousness of God in him.

There is that transfer. There is that transfer. This evening we want to look at these verses and this whole book written by John. It's a very warm letter that he writes. It's full of a sense of the love of God and it's full of a sense of the church being the family of God.

And as we read through the letter, John has a particular focus in mind and perhaps there are two things in particular that he wants to bear in mind as he writes this letter to them.

And as we read at the beginning of the letter, we see that he refers to fellowship or communion, the fellowship that he has himself with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ, and writing so that they may also have the same communion and the same fellowship.

[ 2 : 13 ] And that kind of understanding of the church as the family of God is sharing in the very things that John himself shared in as somebody who experienced the life and witness of the Lord Jesus.

When we come to chapter 5, we see once more that he has the desire to write these things to them at verse 13, so that you will know that you have eternal life.

What a great purpose. We have the whole word of God and it is for that purpose. But specifically in this letter, John makes it clear that he wants his hearers, as God wants us this evening, to know that we have eternal life.

And as he writes the letter, perhaps we can notice by way of an adduction that in order to help them to understand that they are the children of God, that they belong to God's family.

There are three particular tests that he pulls together through this letter to show to them what must be true if they are the genuine children of God.

[ 3 : 28 ] And there is the theology test or the Christology test, the test of their understanding who the Lord Jesus is. A crucial test. If they get that wrong, and if you and I get that wrong, then everything else is going to be a model.

But if we understand something about who Christ is and what God has done in him, then we have the foundation for a life lived as the children of God.

The second or third test, the second we can look at as the kind of moral test, how do you live your life if you're the child of God? How do you live your life as the light of the world?

Your life must be different. There is a moral test. And thirdly, there is a social test which connects with the passage this evening. That is that they are to live together as the people of God in a particular way.

And if these three things, if they pass these three tests, then they can be assured that they are the people of God. And for ourselves, as we worship God this evening, if we ourselves pass these three tests, we can go home with the confidence that God is telling us that we are the children of God.

[ 4 : 52 ] And so against that background, we want to think this evening of the cross of Jesus Christ and the message of propitiation. I want to think, first of all, of the design.

God is the great designer. He has designed what the church should look like. And as we read from verse 7 onwards, we see something of God's design for his church.

And the design comes before us with this exhortation by John in verse number 7. Let us love one another.

And just like Paul speaking about love, we understand and believe that John will understand love in the context of the Old Testament and not so much from the culture in which he was writing this letter.

The Old Testament love that speaks of the free movement of God, of searching an object to love, of spending his energy, as it were, for the good and well-being of that object, and in self-sacrifice, ensuring the well-being of the person now chosen as the object of love.

[ 6 : 21 ] Let us love. But here the love is not for us to love God in return for his love for us, but it is to love one another.

And he is speaking to the community of faith. He is speaking to the family of God. He is speaking to the church of Jesus Christ, for them to love the people next to themselves, those who share family membership with them, those who are themselves the children of God.

And as we think of ourselves as the church of Jesus Christ this evening, here is an exhortation for us to take on board and to allow our hearts to be examined by what the Word of God is saying when it's telling you and I to love one another.

And it may, on the surface, be quite a simple test. But if we do allow the Word of God to examine us as we should, then what appears simple is actually quite searching.

that you tonight and I tonight can say with regard to all of the people of God that we love them as we love ourselves, as we love our Savior.

[ 7 : 53 ] It's a high standard. It's a standard that God expects us to reach. It is the standard that works in the family of God. And the reason why it is, the standard, or the first reason why it is the standard is because love is from God.

We are the children of God this evening because God has poured His love into our hearts, according to Paul in Romans 5, by His Holy Spirit. There is an invisible channel from God in heaven into the hearts of His children, an invisible channel through which floods into their hearts the very love of God itself.

It's a generous supply of the love that there is in God. And tonight, as the children of God, we are recipients of that love.

Connected to God. But these verses tell us, as so much of the Bible tell us, that we are not just to be recipients.

That we ourselves are to be conduits or channels for the love to reach others. And it is such a beautiful thing to experience the love of God in Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 25 ] And to be caught up with my Savior and all of His preciousness and in all of His beauty. It's a great place to be in. But we are not to stop in that place.

We are not going to forget that place, but we are not to stop there. Tonight, God requires you and I to be the conduit, the channel through which that love touches other people.

And that makes the test of our love for others the question to be answered not by ourselves, but to be answered by the other person.

Are we conduits of God's love to others? How much does the person next to me feel that God's love flows through me and touches their lives?

God's design, that's how it should be. That's how it is in the natural family. And much more so now, it should be in the family of God.

[ 10 : 35 ] God, that our family membership ensures that we have family relationships and that these relationships are bound together with the love that is from God.

And when John is setting the standard for them in God's design for his church, he reverses his argument in order to show that if they're not loving, then certain things are simply not true.

Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. If we're not loving one another this evening, if we're not loving the other person, it means that we don't know God.

We may know about God. We may learn a lot of detail and have a lot of knowledge about God, but we don't know God relationally as his children who are born into his family by the power of his spirit

and because of his love.

If we don't love, we don't know God. And that turns the whole picture into you and I examining this evening whether we do have that living, personal relationship with God, that relationship of faith and of love and of trust that's living and that's real.

[12:13] And because of that, anyone who does not love, does not know God because God is love.

If we're born of God, we know God. We are the product of the love of God. And as John says in the beginning of chapter 5, if we love the Father that has begotten us through whom we are born ourselves, then we love all of the other people who are born into his family.

Love is from God and God is love. His very existence is a continuous, constant being that is love. all of his actions are loving. And the God who is love in that way is the God who channels his love into the hearts and lives of his own people.

To the extent that we can nearly say that the child of God is love also. Because the love that is now channeled into our hearts as the children of God, God, it is the eternal love of God that will never come to an end.

[13:33] And because it's that kind of love, then our hearts must be loving. Loving God who loved us first and loving brothers and sisters in the Lord.

God is love. He is the spring and the source of all the love that works in the church. And that love now evidences itself by showing itself in the lives of the children of God who love each other.

And as we mentioned in chapter 5 verse 13, he's writing to them that they may know that they have everlasting life. And in chapter 3 we read that John is saying to them that we know we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren.

There's an assurance in loving the brethren. There may be some here tonight and myself one of them and one of the first tokens or evidences of God working in life is a love for the people of God. We cannot be the children of God without loving the people of God. God's design to know in our heart that we love the people of God and to know because we love that we know we have passed from death to life.

[15:04] The design. Secondly I want us to think of disorder. Something is wrong and something has gone wrong and verse 10 refers to the thing that has gone wrong.

Here's the propitiation for our sins. Here is disorder in God's creation.

John tells us in chapter 3 that sin is lawlessness. It's rebellion against God. It disrupts our relationship with God. It's an inner attitude through which we want to serve ourselves and to not God sin is lawlessness.

And that sin has come into the world that God created in all of its beauty. In the beginning the earth was without form and void and darkness covered the face of the deep and then God said let there be light and there was light.

chaos becomes order in accordance with God's design. The beauty of God's creation.

[16:27] But sin intruded that world of perfect beauty. That world of perfect environment for us to live in. Sin intruded through the sin of Adam.

And the Bible makes it clear in Romans 5 that because of that intrusion of sin that we are all sinners.

One man sinned death entered and death came upon all because all have sinned. And this evening as we think of our responsibility to love God and to love the people of God we have to come face to face with our sinnership and with the fact that there is no neutrality.

There's no one here sitting on the fence and deciding what to do with the gospel because they have the free choice just to dismiss or to accept. It's not like that.

All of us together are listed as those who have sinned against God. and when I see the way in which sin intruded God's perfect environment two particular things stand out for me in that account in the Bible.

[17:49] The first is that it has affected man's relationship with God. Adam is hiding from God. There is disorder. It also affects Adam's relationship with Eve.

They are covering themselves because they are ashamed. What was beautiful and in order has been turned into chaos because of the sin of Adam and the sin that becomes the sin of humankind. And let's tonight absorb that simple truth that we are all sinners before God.

the rest of the Bible means nothing to us unless we absorb that and embrace that. The disorder. And the key thing is what is God's response to the disorder?

Is God with all respect sitting as a bystander and watching the world go into chaos and is unaffected by what happens?

[ 19 : 06 ] Well the Bible tells us that is not the case. And the God who is love in these verses is the God in chapter one who is the God who is light. And light speaks to me of the salvation of God shining into a dark world.

But light also speaks to me of the holiness of God. Of the light that came down in the Old Testament and the people of God weren't allowed to touch or come near the mountain in case they were destroyed.

The holiness of God. God is light. And I need to be aware as we read the word of God that God is not the unmoved mover of everything but that he is moved by everything that happens in his own creation.

that when he created the world at first he saw everything including humankind and God saw everything and it was all very good.

As soon as God created there are new relationships that belong to the creation in which we live and there is this relationship of delight in what God himself has done and now I'm expecting that there's a different response because of your sinnership and mine and what is that different response?

[ 20 : 41 ] It's what's at the center of our understanding of verse 10 it is the wrath of God and as Paul says in Romans 1 the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all and godliness and righteousness of men.

There is a breaking forth of another channel and it's the channel of the wrath of God a wrath that is there because of his holiness a wrath that is now focused on every sinner in the world as the object of his divine wrath and the wrath that speaks of destruction.

The writer to Hebrews says that our God is a consuming fire and that we are all waiting for the day of the judgment of God and the revelation of the divine wrath.

God is moved by our sin and he is moved in his wrath. There emerges something new in our relationship with God because of the entrance of something new which is our sin and that something new is the wrath of God.

God and we can remind ourselves that wrath is not the opposite of love. Hate is the opposite of love. There is the God who is love constantly continually forever but there is the God now who is holy who is angry with us because of our sin.

[ 22 : 29 ] And as surely as there is no place of neutrality as far as our sinnership is concerned. There is no place of neutrality as far as the wrath of God is concerned.

His wrath is not diverted from you unto the next person and you are to be left without any sign of the wrath of God resting upon you. Each and every one of us together this evening because of our sin we are the objects of the wrath of God.

And that's why Paul says in Ephesians 2 that we are by our very nature the children of wrath. The wrath of God is resting upon us.

And what does that make us see? The wonder of the mystery of God. The God who is love unchangeably.

the God who is holy unchangeably. It's the God now who is expressing himself in a new way toward us because of our sin.

[ 23 : 47 ] It doesn't change his love. It doesn't change his holiness. But there is a new relationship. The disorder and the impact of the disorder on God.

And perhaps at this very moment it's a moment for contemplation. A moment for silence because this is what God is saying.

And this is how he sees us because of who we are. And a moment of contemplation to allow the voice and the being of God to shine into our darkness and to awaken us to the reality of our plight as those who have sinned, as those who are the objects of his wrath, and as those who are hissing through this world at what sometimes feels like some horrific rate into an eternity when we will meet with God.

Can you tonight be disinterested in the message of the gospel? Is it possible for you to listen and not to be moved and not to think?

To think about who you are and to think about who God is. The design, the disorder, and thirdly, the demonstration, the show, the display of God's response.

[ 25 : 46 ] What will God's love do in the light of your plight? what will God's love do in the light of his own wrath? Is God's love going to cease working because of the intrusion of sin?

We see love working in this new magnificent way, and that's what we have in version number 10.

And this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son.

the response to his own wrath on the part of God is not to abandon us and to leave humankind into its lostness and final judgment, but as the missionary God to send his missionary Son into the very world of disorder and of chaos.

And the holy and the beautiful Son of God becomes God's missionary ambassador into God's world in order to deal with the disorder that sin has brought into the world.

And we should never lose sight of the significance and the mystery and the beauty and the glory of the Son of God coming into the world.

[ 27 : 09 ] His birth in Bethlehem. Not any other child that we can celebrate their birth, but the entrance of the Son of God into the world because God so loved the world.

God's love responds by sending his Son. God sent his Son to be the God world.

And how does this channel work? What happens when love comes down in this way? God sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

A big word. A word that we can shy away from. But it's the word that God uses. It's a crossword. It's a word that we need to understand. If we are to understand the love of God, the propitiation concerning our sin.

[ 28 : 35 ] And in John's culture, and in the pagan culture, propitiation was something that people were familiar with. And we're familiar with it because propitiation is something that happened at the pagan temple when something went wrong and the God needed to be appeased.

The person who offended is to bring a sacrifice or a payment to the pagan temple in order to appease the wrath of the God who is offended.

And so it is the offender that brings the sacrifice to the person who is offended. And that highlights the beauty of this initiative of God's love.

That in our lostness and in our wrath and our disorder, God does not wait for us to take the initiative because if he did, nothing would ever happen.

But God himself not only takes the initiative, he himself makes the provision so that his own wrath is taken away.

[ 29 : 52 ] he provides his son so that the son becomes the sacrifice who suffers for sin and turns away his wrath.

death. And part of the miraculous event that takes place when that happens is that the God who is to be propitiated is the God who provides the sacrifice and the sacrifice is his own son.

And when we read the story of the cross, the only begotten son who came into this world of disorder, he is the son upon whom God laid the iniquity of us all.

That's what we read in Isaiah chapter 53. And it was the will of the Lord to crush him, he was crushed for our iniquities.

That the channel of the eternal wrath of God is redirected so that it lands on the passion of his son and the fullness of the wrath of God is poured out on the son of God in order to appease the wrath of God and in order to bring about the calmness of our restored relationship.

[ 31 : 29 ] Jesus on his way to the cross he had a prayer which he repeated three times and the prayer was because there was a cup the father was giving to him a cup that's described in Isaiah 52 as the cup of wrath and as the cup of staggering staggering because of the eternal wrath of God and God is taking that cup and going to place it in the hand of his son as he goes to Calvary's cross and Jesus knows that the cross will be a staggering experience he knows that the cross will be a crushing experience because in the words of Revelation 14 he's going to drink the cup of God's wrath poured full strength undiluted he's going to drink the cup dry and we go to

Calvary's cross and we read Psalm 22 and we see something of the staggering and the crushing of the body of the son of God on Calvary's cross with his heart melting with his bones being out of joint the sheer weight of the eternal wrath of God and darkness surrounds the cross that's what wrath means isolation is experienced in the cross separation from God that's what wrath means the depths of the distance that Jesus experienced between himself and God the father on Calvary's

cross is the measure of the wrath of God my God why have you forsaken me he suffered in her place he suffered the wrath of God and there is a word that Jesus uttered on the cross and it's a word that speaks of calm it's a word that speaks of calm for him but it's a word also that speaks of calm in God the wrath is turned away and when

Jesus said it is finished it was done he had drank the cup to its dregs he had satisfied the wrath of God and the God whose response to the disorder of sin and his own wrath was to sing to son it's now the God if we can speak so with reverence it's now the God himself knows what it is to be calm with regard to his relationship with those who are his people and that's what Isaiah refers to in chapter 12 as we close I will give thanks to you oh Lord for though you are angry with me your anger is turned away and you comforted me where has the change taken place has it not taken place in two places your anger was turned away from me that's the beauty of the cross that's what it means for you and for me who are under the wrath of God that God's anger is turned away we cannot ignore that that's so precious but the change also takes place in the prophet and in the sinner and the person who comes to Jesus you comforted me with the same calm with the same peace with the same sense of being the children of God and tonight that's why the call for us to love one another is important and it's important because no matter how a relationship with other people becomes disordered by something going wrong we have the example of God our Father that the disorder brought about by our sin didn't bring an end to his love but that instead he showed his love in a new and unexpected way and tonight we can go from here as those who are beginning to appreciate more and more what the love of

God looks like and when something happens and when things do go wrong and when somebody hurts me and when somebody gives me every good reason not to love them to come back to the cross and to see how God's love worked it doesn't stop working it finds new ways to overcome and so let's be inspired this evening as we leave here to love the Lord of course in the first place and to love one another and through the challenges of life to have our own love working in new and different ways as we fulfill God's design as the people of God loving one another in the chaotic world in which we live and how the world needs a church that is functioning in accordance with God's design to see something and perhaps to feel something of the love that flows from you as a close I was going to quote this verse which I just came across today it's from the hymn

God is love let heaven adore him and with this I close God is love and though with blindness sin afflicts the human soul God's eternal loving kindness guides and heals and makes us whole sin and death and hell shall never over us final triumph gain God is love so love forever over the universe must reign may be so in our hearts may be so in our world and may we give glory to God by loving him and loving one another may God bless his word let us pray most gracious God we worship your name you are the God who has done wonderful things who has made yourself known in the special way in your son and we rejoice in that and help us oh Lord God tonight to love and return help us to embrace to receive help us to rejoice in the message of salvation and help us to seek you with all of our hearts that we may find peace and rest in you and know the calm of your wrath being turned away and have the joy of knowing that we are the children of

[ 39 : 13 ] God indeed bless our hearts in that way we pray as we journey on from here and bless our hearts as we journey on to the week as it unfolds before us have mercy we pray and hear us we pray these things for Jesus sake Amen concluding psalm is psalm 122 in the Scottish Psalter it's on page 416 and we're singing at verse number 6 psalm 122 at verse number 6 and the tune is Belmont pray that Jerusalem may have peace and felicity let them that love thee and thy peace have still prosperity we're singing from verse 6 to the end of the psalm to God's praise peace and

In some felicity Let them not love Beyond thy peace But still prosperity And for thy wish That peace may still Within thy walls remain And ever may Thy policies Prosperity retain Now for my friends And brethren see Peace be in thee I'll stay And warm the hands Of God our Lord And sing thy good Amen I'll go to the main door After the benediction The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all now and forevermore Amen Amen