“Whose Idea Was This Anyway?”
Sermon for 22 March 2015
Texts

Now there’s a question for you! Whose idea was the church anyway? It is God’s idea. He is the Author and Creator of the church. Any and all criticism leveled against the church is ultimately directed at the Author and Creator. All we say and do is to be weighed first against His intentions and purpose. Church is not a mythical construct invented to give us something to do with our Sundays! And church is in desperate need of revival, charged with the extension of God’s rule (His Kingdom) into every nook and cranny of human culture bringing our affairs in line with His will—not our wills, not our pleasures, our goals or desires! That is a hard, if not bitter pill to take in this self-absorbed, man-centered debacle we find ourselves in the midst of!

Allow me to introduce you to God again. Why? Because that introduction would go a long ways towards reviving us. I believe it is fair to observe that we live in a culture—gifted to us by certain philosophers and secular humanists—which mocks the very idea of sin. Woe unto those who call evil good and good evil. (Isaiah 5:20) And woe to those who parse the difference into incoherence, spreading confusion and error. Consider the directness of Psalm 51:4:

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

What makes our sinning heinous, our sins atrocious is this God with Whom we have to do, and Whom likewise deals with us! God plainly deserves better. He is infinitely glorious, true and right and pure. He deserves perfect love, pure devotion and perfect obedience. This is according to His self-revelation in Scripture. From our side of the equation, we might observe: the wrong view of God results in a wrong view of sin.

I will set forth the attributes of our God: First, He is sovereign. He is not a sovereign (among others), but the sovereign absolute—above all others, King of kings. Do not fear those who can kill the body, fear rather the One who can cast body and soul together into eternal damnation. [The Message renders this colorfully: 28 “Don’t be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There’s nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands.”] There are many bullies in this sin mocking, God denying culture. We shall see if intimidation has the last word! Matthew 10:28-31 Where individualism, the autonomous self and democracy are exalted narratives, and where activists declare more and more inherent rights (as “self-evident truths”), it is challenging to declare the sovereignty of God. However, we must. Civilizations come and go, God alone is above all; He is sovereign.
God’s rule is limitless. His authority is entire. He possesses everything; He is the ultimate sole possessor of the entire cosmos. So He does as He pleases and the power of life and death are in His hands, at His command. Every sinner is a rebel and/or defector. Despite the unaltered obedience of Creation’s greatest powers, throughout time, man, pathetically alone, shakes his puny fist at God! Who is he to take on the Almighty? To haul God into the courts of human opinion? Such a defiant posture is insanely self-destructive!! Not merely foolish, or ignorant folly. Human rebellion plunges us into ignorance, idolatry and paganism. For the lost to be saved, they must become aware of their sin and when they put their sin before a holy God, they instantly know their need for a Savior!

Second, God is holy. He is holy, holy, holy—the trisagion, so-called; or highest form of the superlative degree in Hebrew. What does holy mean? I conveys One who is marked off, regarded as transcendent, separate, wholly and completely other than us! Twelve stone markers were erected around Mt. Sinai, lest the people come too close and be consumed! No one who is sinful, defiled, or impure can survive the presence of our Holy Lord God. He is incomparably holy! No wonder, Jesus taught us to pray, Our Father in heaven hallowed be Thy Name. Exalt Him, Exalt His Name, Exalt His attributes! God is above all moral corruption, utterly separate from the profane. He is impeccable (does not, cannot, will not sin ever) and pure! Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness?” (Exodus 15:11) He cannot even be tempted by sin, or evil (James 1:13). More, He hates sin, hold hatred and disgust towards it. (Habakkuk 1:13).

Third, God is righteous. (tsaddik in Heb; dikaios in Gk.) We must elevate the rightness, the moral excellence, perfection of God! His righteousness is not an attitude, but an attribute. It is not a choice because it is His very nature—like His sovereignty and His holiness! God possesses everlasting integrity. All His works are perfect . . . His words, ordinances and commands, His Law! All His ways are just. There is no hint of partiality, or injustice in His justice—His people are chosen not for preference, but for His purposes! There is no such thing as moral neutrality. He is not apathetic about human wickedness and has appointed a day for judgment to establish that judgment is alive and well. That day is our actionable reference point because our goal is acquittal, or justification leading to eternal life and reward! No accusation against Him can, or will stand against His works, decrees, or judgments because He does all things perfectly well. If we are going to have an infinitely powerful and sovereign God, our God is the very best one we could ever hope for!

This is great news for the righteous, for those who are saved through faith by grace as surely as it is the worst new for the unrighteous! Proverbs 21: 15: When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers. All fallen men are evil—life and Scripture testify to this! For there is none righteous, no not one! (Psalm 14:1 and Romans 3:10) As for “from life,” we merely have to examine the fruit of evildoers’ lives. The terror of a final and just judgment drives us all to acknowledge our critical need for an advocate (perhaps a defense attorney!). Even
the existence of an imperfect judgment from fallen judges on earth does this much! If people do not believe in this reality of impeding judgment, several conclusions may be formed: 1. Their consciences are so seared that they believe the whole thing to be a myth/ a clever, coercive device of the over-class to subjugate others to their will; 2. Prideful self-belief that despite evidence to the contrary I am good enough, righteous in myself. I have no regrets. 3. God could not possibly be more righteous than I am righteous; or they claim He is not qualified, willing or even able to judge. My enemies taunt me, Where is thy God? (Psalm 42:10 and Micah 7:10) (This position suggests that God is flawed, imperfect, in a word: not God at all.) 4. They are signally ignorant (as in spiritually dead) and spiritually hopeless.

Romans 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." (Joel 2:32) 14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"

How people work themselves into this state is one concern? They exist apart from, or without Christ, that’s how! We are all, apart from Christ, born blind to justice, righteousness and equity—and even innocence, purity and love—if we are not known by Him! We are the ones Jesus addresses, if God does not intervene, Away from Me, ye workers of iniquity I never knew you! (Matthew 7:23) How they escape their servitude to sin is our privilege and opportunity! We, the church, are the revelation of God, His fullness and His person to the lost, and to the world. Now there’s a check on our misbehavior. Those who know who they are in Christ will not forget themselves and lightly turn to sinning. We once played fast and loose with the truth; but no longer! 11 A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight. (Proverbs 11:1) From finances to philosophy, God demands righteousness and truthfulness.

Fourthly, God is love. With Him it is not an interest, or a hobby! “Men must know that it is not their merit or virtue but God’s love that moves Him to give Himself freely and selflessly to others for their benefit or good.” (Washer, p.91) (See Deut. 7:7-8) 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but 6it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

q Dt 10:15 Is 43:4 Is 63:9 Je 31:3 Ho 11:1 Mal 1:2
r Ex 32:13 Ps 105:9–11 Lk 1:72 Lk 1:73
“He (God) is the essence of what true love is, and all true love flows from Him as its ultimate source. Men must now that it would be easier to count all the stars in the heavens, or each grain of sand on the earth, than to measure, or even seek to describe the love of God.” (Washer, p. 91)

Part of my job in preaching is to set forth the benevolence of God, the love of God towards the undeserving and sinful! Even as we self-destruct, and assist others towards self-destruction, God seeks to rescue us. God chooses not to treat us according to our merit, or worth but according to His own love and tender kindness with an abundance of grace . . . generously. By love He directs His grace towards us, the sheer unmerited grace of the Most High is both astonishing and winsome. Isaiah 30 (ESV):

18Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore He exalts Himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him.

He saves those who cannot save themselves and has promised in ages to come to shower His surpassing riches on undeserving saints in heaven! Love supports His patience, His long-suffering . . . His restrained anger and His limited wrath because He knows we are flesh, a wind that passes and does not return. Psalm 78 (ESV):

38 Yet He, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; He restrained His anger often and did not stir up all His wrath.
39 He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.

He does not wish for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance . . . to a knowledge of the truth. (I Timothy 2:4) The ultimate expression of true love is found in God’s sending forth His Son for the salvation of His people! (1 John 4:8-10) This is the real love we all need, all hunger for. Here God’s love is shown as most, most, most lovely! And our sin is seen as most heinous, ungrateful and atrocious. Thus, in sovereignty, holiness, righteousness and love God is set forth as gloriously worthy of all love, devotion and obedience, all worship. Worship is a time when we pay deep, sincere, awesome respect, love, and fear to the one who created us. That is the purpose for all that is or ever will be! For where God is worshipped in spirit and in truth (for such God desires to worship Him), grace extended finds expression in the enlarged kingdom. Forgiven in Christ, we are reconciled to God and we forgive ourselves on our way to forgiving others.

Amen