

“God Loves You
And Has a Plan for Your Life”
Sermon for 4 June 2017
Text: Ephesians 1:1-10

Perhaps you recognize the title of this sermon? It is one of the evangelical stand-by's. Evangelicals think of it as a truism—something so obvious as to be immediately welcomed as wonderful good news. However, as is the case with many truisms, this one bears some scrutiny. And, as we do that, it may become obvious why this approach, in addition to be selfish and simplistic, misrepresents the offer. Here's the offer: God has a plan, His plan for your life. His plan is that you would spend eternity with Him, forgiven and cleansed of sin and unrighteousness, as **holy** and as **full of faith**. Full of faith is meaning of Paul's salutation: **faithful in Christ Jesus**.

President Eisenhower once remarked on *Judeo-Christian values* (December 22, 1952): “And this is how they [the Founding Fathers in 1776] explained those: 'we hold that all men are endowed by their Creator...' not by the accident of their birth, not by the color of their skins or by anything else, but 'all men are endowed by their Creator.' In other words, our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion with all men are created equal.”¹

God, it turns out, is a little more particular! My point is that as grand as God's plan for us (eternal residence with Him in full and free fellowship, or communion) that plan is decidedly not the first choice of many who endure this bubbly declaration. For many people what God wants for them is either unknown, or secondary. Very few people have front and center the desire to be conformed to Jesus Christ and so to be fitted for heaven. And say they prefer their own plans for their lives as more important, more fulfilling, more attractive. I suppose that this is the downside of being so decidedly positive about this heavenly future . . . besides, this approach is so bloodless. God's plan for your life is rooted in His deep and costly love for sinners. There is a cross, and on that cross an atoning Savior, even Jesus Christ, who through **the blood of the atonement** satisfied the justice of God, absorbed the wrath of God—vindicating God as merciful and just. It was because God loved sinners, that He sacrificed His Only Son—and because God thought we were worth it, He went through with His plan for our salvation. *There was no other way—Jesus asked and the request was denied.*

So, these details, the facts that we are all sinners and that God, rich in mercy and great in love, intervened to save us from condemnation and wrath, must be

¹ Eisenhower at the time was not a church member. Born into a family of Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites who later became Jehovah's Witnesses, Eisenhower's decision to pursue a military and then a political career put him at odds with the Witnesses' pacifistic and apolitical doctrines and despite being religious did not belong to any congregation during his time in the Army; he became a Presbyterian in 1953, after his first election. He sponsored prayers at cabinet sessions and held prayer breakfasts.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/And_I_don%27t_care_what_it_is

included if your offer of a *plan for your life* is to be a gospel offer. If it is bloodless, and even worse, Christ-less, it is worthless. God loves you and has a plan for your life is not even Christian unless Christ, the cross and the blood are at the heart of it!

Based on these criterion, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is definitely Christian. And we are neither disappointed, nor surprised. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 1:22-3 **For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Greeks.** And to reinforce his point in 1 Cor. 2:1-2 he continues: **And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.** Where is **Christ crucified** in this passage? We find it explicitly in verse 7: **In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.** . . . so, according to this verse, it is the blood, the blood of the cross, shed upon the cross that, according to the plan of God, accomplishes our salvation. *This proclamation is central to our faith and it is still foolishness to the Greeks today.*

How can an event, occurring nearly two thousand years ago, involving an itinerate preacher/son of a carpenter from a dusty, remote little town like Nazareth, crucified on a desolate hill outside the walls of Jerusalem, even matter, still matter to me? And the answer is: because **of the blood of Jesus** we have **the forgiveness of our sins.** (v.7) His blood was *the blood of atonement* shed for the forgiveness of our sins—our sins, their sins, the sins of all prior humanity and *also* of all those yet to come. Here we see the love of God reaching out, His plan, engaging with those who most need that love (in a public manner, on the cross) most plainly, in everyone's view.

And we, who have benefitted from, or internalized that love, are made very aware that it is **this love** communicated *by us* to others saving-ly that works redemption as the Holy Spirit directs. Loving others with the love of God, we hope that they in turn may love Him back! This is the chief characteristic of Christian mission . . . His mercy, His kindness! Love moves us from the dry performance of duty to open joy and gladness. When you share the love of God in the Christian way, you not only make someone else's day, you influence his future—and your day turns out to be not so bad as well!

So, Jesus died to bear the wrath of God provoked by our sin and rebellion out of God's love for us. We had transgressed, offended God and He paid the price to absolve the debt. So, far from being insignificant, this event, the crucifixion becomes the center of everything pertaining to God and man. It is hard to imagine two doctrines more offensive to modern man than the atonement and the blood. Yet Paul declares **God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing** and the *means* of conveyance are the Son willing to die for our sins and the cross upon which the atonement transpired. These were the instruments of grace that God decided to use.

Dying on the cross was God's plan for Jesus. Jesus would die so that you and I could go free. He died in our place, for our sin. Some people object: how unfair, how cruel and unjust. I didn't ask Jesus to die for me? Proud flesh believes in

self-salvation and, under the guise of false tolerance desperately lobbies for many ways to God, to salvation! But the point of atonement isn't how unfair, cruel and unjust the death of Jesus appears to be, rather the point is how necessary it was. *It is important to know, there never was, and still is not, any other way for anyone to be saved! **It was NECESSARY for Christ to come and to lay down His life for us . . . it was ordained, planned for and, in the fullness of time, enacted.***

We also know and affirm the motivation: **God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son so that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life**. And what follows also is relevant: **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**. (John 3:16-17). Love more than propositional truth, more than moral living, more than justice, more than a casual offer of God's plan . . . the love of God for the lost, the spiritually lamed, the helpless! He reached down to us because we could not reach up to Him. He saves us, we do not save ourselves.

Sin is a rupture of a love relationship. Scripture depicts it as a betrayal, treason; we, the beloved, turned rebel and traitor. There is a disclosed broken-heartedness involved with sin because of its deeply personal nature—it grieved and offended God. This sin is not offending a stranger, but it is offending your very best of friends—not a human acquaintance, but God of very God. That is why it took something very personal, like sending His beloved Son to lay down his life for us, to mediate a reconciliation between us and God. It took atoning blood! That is why the bible uses infidelity and adultery to describe our turning away from God. Only, in this case, there is no no-fault divorce! What went wrong went terribly, deeply wrong—worse than an oil spill!—it was a world-wide catastrophe which polluted us to the core, and not on just the surface! Seven angels do not pour out bowls of wrath for parking fines! All that was pure and entirely good vanished with the Fall—it was a mercy that Adam and Eve were banished and not compelled to see the ruin they had wrought on God's goodness in the Garden. Only Christ could do this and only a crucified Christ has done it.

So, there is no such thing as a Christliness gospel, or as an unrepentant sinner! There is no such thing as living our own life once we've been washed in the blood of the lamb **and we are filled with His life**. Paul is exactly right to draw our attention to the **blood of atonement**—all our blessedness flows from the cross, from His wounded side. Such amazing, costly, saving love. Not only is that what God wants for me, it is also what's in it for me *if I have any notion of what's truly good for me*—but I was once too lost to know it, too broken to seek it, too weak to attain it. So, praise God that Christ came from heaven and gifted it to me. It depends on Him, not me. O the amazing, costly saving love of God!

The tomb is empty
 Death has fled
 Christ is risen from the dead!

I know He lived,
 I know He died

And so God's wrath was satisfied.

From guilt I'm freed
My shame is covered
By His great love, I'm recovered.

Now we are forever His—
To live forever at His side—
His pure and blood-bought Bride.

Amen