



Advent Week 4: God's Sacrificial Love Saves Us

Matthew 1:18-21, 1 John 4:7-10

We see the greatest of loves through Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

Picture of the greatest love: 1 John 4:10

- Love originates from God, not us. It does not start with our feelings, emotions, or desires. It all starts with God as the source of love.
- God's love is sacrificial, by sending His son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The Nativity story: Matthew 1:21

- Jesus – “Yeshua” – Yahweh Saves
- **Save** his people from their **sins**

Sin: Foreign and taboo concept in our culture

- Why? I wonder if it is because our authority structures have shifted. Before, culture found their authority in God, institutions, and leaders. Now, we find our authority in ourselves.
- Recent Barna survey:
 - 44% say moral truth is relative; 21% admit to never having thought about it. Only 35% of Americans agree that moral truth is absolute.
 - 91% say the best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself.
 - 79% say people can believe whatever they want, as long as those beliefs don't affect society or hurt someone.
- John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies: Authority to Authenticity*. He writes, “The philosopher Charles Taylor, in his seminal work *A Secular Age*, wrote about how the West changed from a culture of ‘authority’ to a culture of ‘authenticity.’ Meaning, we used to live by what external authority structures (God, the Bible, tradition, and so on) told us to do, but now most Western people live from what their internal ‘authentic self’ wants to do.”

- I think authenticity is great and we want to become an authentic church, but we mess it all up when we become the determiners of right and wrong, when our internal selves start playing God.
- When rules and standards are based on ourselves, we end up not thinking we are really that bad, broken, or even sinful...or at least we're not as bad as some other people.

We want to rewrite Matthew 1:21

- We believe that God saves but might rewrite Matthew 1:21 to say He "saves them from their loneliness...from their relational or financial strain...from their anxiety...or from their depression." Thank goodness God deeply cares about these things, but His love first came down to save us from our sins.
- Jews in Jesus's day also got it wrong. They wanted saving but saving from the oppressive rule of the Romans. Even the Disciples in Acts 1 right before Jesus ascends to heaven ask, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They wanted Jesus riding in on a white horse wiping out the Romans and re-establishing the kingdom of Israel.
- They are like us where we do not see our greatest brokenness. Our greatest brokenness is not our loneliness or depression or anxiety...it is our sin. There is a relationship between our brokenness and sin, and yet it is also very complex. Brokenness is best seen in three categories: sins, wounds, warfare. Reference: *The Invitations of Jesus: A Discipleship Guide*, Appendix C: Barriers to Intimacy with God.
- We need to understand the depth of our sin to fully understand the height of God's salvation. We see this with the sinful woman who anointed Jesus with her tears. She loved much because she was forgiven much.
- The more we stand in the holiness of God, and His majestic, glorious presence shines deep into the dark corners of our soul revealing our sin, the more we live in His love.

Sin

- Important: Understanding and acknowledging sin helps us understand and diagnose the human condition. That there is right and wrong. And when we see horrendous evil in the world, we call it evil. It acknowledges that there is brokenness in the world and in our lives.
- What is sin?
 - To miss the mark, goal, or destination. If the destination is the greatest commandment of loving God and others, sin is not loving God and others.
 - Sin is a disease that wreaks havoc on our soul leading towards destruction, and eventually death. Sin is something small like envy or a lustful thought to the horrendous evils of slavery or ethnic genocide. It is all sin. It is not the measure of sin but the presence of sin that marks the disease in us.

- Old Testament: Sin is like a wild beast wanting to rule us.
- New Testament: Sin is a power or force that rules and lives in us.
- Augustine: “disordered desires or loves...love turned in on itself”
- If sin is love turned in towards itself, then God must be calling us towards love turned out towards others. Jesus is the source and picture of this love. He is the one who saves us from our sins.

Save

- God saves us by healing us of this poison and disease of sin. A disease that keeps us in bondage, separates us from God, and leads us towards death.
- As we saw in 1 John 4:10, God saves us and heals us through Jesus’s atoning sacrifice.
- Why? Because in God’s holy and just ways, the punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Blood needed to be shed. The sacrificial system in the OT reflected the cosmic scales of justice that blood needed to be shed for the forgiveness of sins.
- Example: *Eid al-Adha* animal sacrifices in Indonesia
- As seen in the Old Testament context of sacrifices, there was a heavy cost to sin. The life of an animal was taken. I think that in God’s wisdom the sacrificial system was instituted to acknowledge the devastation of sin. Life has to be taken for forgiveness and cleansing. It points to our need for the final lamb of God.
- Prophecy of the Messiah, Isaiah 53:4-7a: Jesus is our atoning sacrifice. He is our salvation.
- This is not just to get the golden ticket to get out of the bad place and into the good place.
- “It is also certainly and wonderfully true that the message of Jesus and his early followers is not just the forgiveness of sins that allows us to escape the bad place and go to the good place. It is newness of life. To be sure, this new life includes forgiveness, but it includes so much more. This is why the primary word used as a synonym for salvation in the New Testament is life.” – John Ortberg, *Eternity is Now in Session*
- “What if salvation isn’t mostly about getting us into heaven but about getting heaven into us.” – John Ortberg, *Eternity is Now in Session*
- 1 John 4:9: “to live through him” – now and for eternity
- God’s sacrificial love saves us.

Victor Hugo’s “*Les Miserables*”: In this scene from the 1998 version written by Rafael Yglesias and directed by Bille August, the bishop says, “Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, with this silver I bought your soul. I’ve ransomed you from fear and hatred, and now I give you back to God.”

– “*Les Miserables*” (1998)