

# The Problem With Man

REVIEW: This morning we continue in our long look at salvation. We began this gaze at salvation by looking at the glory of God. We did so in large part because we need to see just how great and glorious God really is so we can understand our real position before God as humanity. This winds up putting things in perspective for us.

INTRO: Too often humanity thinks of itself much more highly than it ought to think - especially in our relationship to God. In reflecting on this, I firmly believe this comes from two sources: the first is that over the years Christians have radically embraced the love, mercy and grace of God, all the while severely downplaying the wrath of God toward sin. Which leads to the second reason which is while this major emphasis on God's love, and the downplay of God's wrath, we have come to the false conclusion that God is supposed to love us, because really we are not that bad.

- I. We ended last week looking at the fact that we are a worshipping people.
  - A. We are happy to paint our bodies the color of our favorite sports team and stand in 10 degree temps to cheer for our team
  - B. We can often answer more questions about who wore what to the Emmys or the Grammys than we can about the characters in the Bible
  - C. We as humanity have been wired to worship
    1. And we are wired to worship by God
    2. The problem is that we have exchanged the worship of our Creator for His created blessings
      - a) Food is an amazing blessing from God, but when we live to eat rather than eat to live we are more excited about the gift than the giver
      - b) Sex is a blessing from God, and I have to do little to convince you that this gift has been taken from its proper place as a gift from God, and become a god to so many
      - c) Money is a gift from God for us to use to provide for our families and to serve others - again, too many people desire the gift and forget the Giver
  - D. So what happens when we use this gift of worship that was given for us to worship God, and rather than worshipping Him, we worship the things He has given us?
    1. Last week we looked at the fact that God is consumed with His own glory
    2. In fact, the chief end of man is to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever"
    3. The scriptures paint the picture that nature itself is calling out to glorify God - sort of God's glory stage

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- a) Isaiah 55:12 - the mountains and hills sing and the trees clap their hands
  - b) Luke 19:40 - the stones will cry out in worship when we do not
  - c) Romans 8:22 - all of creation groans to be released from the curse
  - d) Go to Jeremiah 2:11-12 "Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD."
    - (1) These verses open with God's people exchanging their glorious God for worthless idols
      - (a) So to see ourselves in this passage, any time we place God's gifts above God in our heart, that is an idol
      - (b) Anytime I have desired some shiny new toy above desiring God - that is an idol
      - (c) Anytime I have looked at a woman with lust in my heart, I am desiring the Creator's creation rather than the Creator
      - (d) Fill in your blank - any time you have wanted that creation and good gift from God more than God - you have exchanged your glorious God for a worthless idol
    - (2) But it goes on to say that the heavens should be appalled at this, agitated and devastated (the actual words used for the phrase "shudder with great horror")
      - (a) But why? Because mankind has the greatest gift ever in having an intimate, personal relationship with the Creator, and instead of pursuing the Creator, we pursue the creation
      - (b) The word picture in Hebrew is that the heavens are terrified that God may snap and tear the universe apart
  - e) So follow the picture in Scripture
    - (1) The universe is God's stage to display His glory, and the universe is doing its part to worship the Creator - Psalm 19:1
    - (2) We, mankind, who was given the role as steward over creation, is not worshipping the Creator, but instead pursuing the creation that we are put in charge of
    - (3) In a very real sense mankind is committing treason
- II. God's response to man's rebellion
- A. Turn to Romans 11:22 - this is a verse that I have read many times, but never quite seen in this light before
    - 1. Romans 11:22 "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off."

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2. Allow me to give you the meaning in context and then take it and apply it to where we are going
  - a) In context this passage is about how the natural vine, Israel, had branches cut off because of unbelief
  - b) The Gentiles were grafted into the Vine, but they were getting kind of arrogant about their being in the Vine
  - c) So Paul is reminding them that If God cut off Israel because of unbelief, do you really think He could not cut you off and re-graft Israel back in - don't get arrogant because it was God's grace that got you where you are, not anything that you did
    - (1) Hence the reminder of the kindness and severity (sternness) of God
      - (a) The word for kindness has the root word of grace and the word for sternness is actually severity (The NIV is weakening the meaning)
      - (2) The point that Paul is making is those that do not consider God's kindness (grace) will face His severity
- B. First thing I want you to notice is that Paul did not stop at "consider the kindness (grace) of God"
  1. This is what often is preached and taught in churches today, and rightly so because the grace of God is an indescribable gift
  2. It is impossible to praise God too much for His grace
- C. But it goes on to ask us to consider the severity of God
  1. This is one that is preached less than it should be, pondered less than it should be, rarely shared with the world, in many ways because we are embarrassed by it, or confused by it ourselves
  2. It is a part of who God is that gets little playtime in church
    - a) The week before I prepared this message, we sang "I could sing of Your love forever." in church
    - b) Can you imagine of that were "I could sing of Your severity forever"
    - c) Doesn't quite have the same warm fuzzy touch
  3. But it is in understanding the severity of God that we can truly grasp and appreciate the grace and kindness of God
  4. It is sad when Pastors or churches are more worried about church growth and the "three b's" (budgets, buildings and butts in the seats) than they are about the full gospel of Christ
    - a) Sadly this comes from a place of fear or shame to share all of what the Scriptures say

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- b) “If a man or woman who teaches the Scriptures is afraid to explain to you the severity of God, they have betrayed you, and they love their ego more than they love you.” - Matt Chandler
- D. Go to Matthew 3:11-12
  - 1. Notice both the kindness and the severity of God - He gathers in His wheat, and the chaff is burned in unquenchable fire
  - 2. But John paints the picture like when Jesus shows up, He will get to work in this separating process
- E. Jesus used a word when He was here 12 times that is a description of God’s response to our lack of response to his kindness and not glorifying Him as He deserves
  - 1. The word is *Gehenna* which we would translate as hell
  - 2. *Gehenna* refers to a valley outside of Jerusalem
    - a) The valley was used by some of the OT kings as a place of worship to the false god Molech, in which they engaged in child sacrifice (Jer. 32:35)
    - b) Closer to Jesus time, the valley became used as the city dump
    - c) They burned garbage there, as well as dead animals and the dead bodies of criminals
  - 3. Around the intertestamental period (the 400 years between the OT writings and the NT’s beginning) the name of the valley became synonymous with the place of final punishment for the wicked
- F. So now we get to Jesus use of the word - when He used it, He was trying to bring the images to mind that people knew the valley to be
  - 1. It was a stinking, smoldering place of destruction
  - 2. The image we are to have is revolting, horrid smells, death, and flames or a smoldering fire
  - 3. It is a dark image - meant to be oppressive and a place that no one would want to have to go to and spend any more time than necessary
  - 4. This is the picture of what Jesus describes as falling short of the glory of God
- G. “Pastor Keith, this is not a very fun message! Death, hell, fire, smoldering, putrid, oppressive! Why would you take us here?”
  - 1. Good question! I take you here because this is God’s response to man giving the glory and worship that was intended for God to something or someone other than God
  - 2. We are considering the severity of God
- H. God’s kindness and His severity both come from the same place: His holiness and self-sufficiency
  - 1. God gives both to His creation

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2. The difference is we by no means deserve God's kindness
  3. By all means we deserve God's severity
- III. We are sinners that fall short of God's glory
- A. We have covered this, and I will pound away at this until the day I die - we did not deserve grace
1. Grace, by its very definition is "unmerited favor"
  2. Paul says in Romans 11:6 "it cannot be based on works, if it were, grace would no longer be grace."
  3. If grace were based on works, think of the number of things that would be affected
    - a) Somehow, you put God in your debt - so God's self-sufficiency goes out the window
    - b) If it is based on works, than grace loses so much of its luster
      - (1) It is not the kindness of a loving God that leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4)
      - (2) It is our own work and effort that earn God's favor
      - (3) And what an exhausting way to live
- B. If you are thinking that you are not that bad, that you deserve something, I refer you back to Ephesians 2 (2:3), "we were by nature, deserving of wrath"
1. That is what we deserve
  2. That is expressed in the sentence of hell
    - a) Some of you know this verse, Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death"
    - b) All sin deserves this sentence
    - c) Who of us has sinned, Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of God's glory"
      - (1) Yes, all of us are sinners
      - (2) And we are NOT sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners
- C. Why is all of this such a big deal?
1. If the book of James is to be believed (which it is), all good things come from God - peace, joy, love, etc
  2. So hell would be the absence of God's goodness and blessing
    - a) Anything good and right and enjoyable is not there
    - b) Which makes hell a terrifying place
      - (1) Jesus described as a place of "gnashing of teeth," a place where the worm does not die
      - (2) Revelation says that the smoke of their torment goes up forever
  3. What is the common response to the idea of hell?

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- a) “How can a loving God send people to a place like that?”
- b) “It’s not fair that people are sent to hell. The punishment does not fit the crime!”
- c) “So if I tell one white lie, or steal candy from a baby, or hit my thumb with a hammer and say a choice word or two I’m going to eternal punishment?”
  - (1) Have you heard these questions before?
  - (2) Maybe you have asked them before
- 4. But when we downplay God’s severity and act like we are really not that bad, we are actually pretty good and deserve kindness, we diminish God’s holiness, and His self-sufficiency.
  - a) Some have even gone so far as to reverse the teachings of scripture
  - b) We turn things around on God and make us out to be the good guys and God is the bad guy for sending people to hell, because at the root of it we believe that people are basically good and don’t deserve hell
  - c) That is pretty twisted when we make ourselves out to be better than we are, we accept God’s grace more or less because we deserve it, and we make God out to be the villain for punishing us
- 5. It is funny that people are accepting of God’s love and use the verse in 1 John, “God is love”
  - a) We like to accept those verses
  - b) But the same Bible that tells us God is love tells us that God will punish those that will not accept the reality of the situation, that they are fallen sinners, separated from God by sin, and that God made a way for them that they did not deserve
    - (1) While there are some people that focus in on the punishment verses of scripture and forget that God is love
    - (2) It is equally dishonest to so focus on the fact that God is love and forget the punishment verses of scripture
- 6. Now, let me blow your mind with something here
  - a) If God is most concerned about His glory (we went over this last week - the universe exists for his glory, and there are many other scriptures about what God did for His glory or for His name)
    - (1) It stands to reason that hell exists because of belittling His name or taking away from His glory
    - (2) So the other issue is that when we try to say that hell is an unjust response to man’s taking glory away from God, we are further belittling His name
    - (3) “Someone who says hell cannot be real, or we can’t all deserve it even if it is real, because God is love is saying that the name and

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renown and the glory of Christ aren't that big of a deal." - Matt Chandler

- (4) When we say that the punishment does not fit the crime, we are saying the crime is not that big of a deal - but robbing God of His glory, belittling His name is a huge deal

D. So what should our response be to the severity of God

1. Well we can try to deny it, like many people
  - a) That just does not seem like something God would do
  - b) But God is the one that told us that He does and He will
2. We can try to dismiss it
  - a) Really our sin is not that big of a deal
  - b) Which is to say, the glory of God, His holiness and His justice are not that big of a deal
3. We can try to justify it
  - a) God is love and would not punish man
  - b) But again does damage to God's holiness, justice, and elevates man to a place where God owes Him kindness or grace, and grace by definition is not owed or earned
4. Here's one we might try - repenting
  - a) We repent of our pride that elevates us to a position of God owing us grace and kindness
  - b) We repent of downplaying the glory of God
  - c) We repent of our self-regard and instead throw ourselves on the grace and mercy of a loving God that has made a way of escape from this place of eternal torment for those that believe
5. Too often we look at the issue of hell from man's perspective, which is the wrong perspective
  - a) We look at it that hell could not possibly be the just payment for any of man's sins
  - b) Rather we should look at it from God's perspective
  - c) "How incredible, how glorious, how amazing and marvelous is this God that hell would be a just payment for sin?"
  - d) John Piper puts it this way, "The horror of hell is an echo of the infinite worth of God's glory."

CONCLUSION: We are going to end there because I just gave you some heavy theology. It is definitely food for thought. This begins to show us man's problem before a holy God. We will pick it up here again next week.