

“The God who pursues sinners.” (3)

There were two little boys who came home after being outside playing all night with a football. Their mum asked them, ‘where did you get that football from?’ They replied, ‘Oh we found it.’ Their mum asked them, ‘are you absolutely sure it was lost?’ ‘Yes,’ say the kids. ‘We saw the people who were looking for it.’

In Australia, some years ago, a small aeroplane went down in the desert after making a distress call. The pilot was killed but the boy with him survived. By the time they had located the wreck, the boy had wandered off. Afraid that the boy would panic at being lost, the father printed thousands of leaflets which he dropped from an aeroplane over the area. The central message was simply this, ‘Johnathon don’t be afraid! I’m looking for you! I’ll find you! I love you, Dad.’ Johnathon found one of those leaflets and this assurance helped see him through until he was finally rescued.

You see loved ones in much the same way God sent us a loving message too in the person of his Son, Jesus. **John 3:16+17** “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Now as we saw in our last lesson, we have to take the blame for our own actions, we have to admit that we’re all sinners and our God is a Holy God. And if we admit that we’re all sinners, we need to then ask the question, **how can a Holy God continue to love sinful people?**

Now this is a question we cannot completely answer, even the apostle Paul tells us that we can’t completely answer that question. **Ephesians 3:19** “To know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Paul says the love God has for mankind surpasses knowledge, in other words it goes way beyond our thinking capabilities.

And maybe we shouldn’t even need to try and figure it out, maybe we should just accept that He does. Maybe we should just accept that God loves mankind because God showed it to us in Jesus Christ. **1 John 4:9** “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.”

Now even we humans have to admit that love among our fellow humans is often mysterious. **I remember speaking to a married couple and the woman told me that she totally loves her husband, despite the fact that all he has done is hurt her since they got married twenty years ago. She was being told by her family and friends that she should simply just get rid of him, but all she does is acknowledge that they care about her and her well-being. So, she simply smiles and murmurs something about loving him no matter what he is.**

Now that kind of love is mysterious and I just can’t understand it. **Haven’t you seen parents cry their hearts out for the return of a child whose selfishness at home drove them to heartbreak? I mean, how do you explain that? And I’m sure we all know of or at least heard of some child who despite being mistreated and abused by their parents, still love their parents with deep devotion and would make all sorts of excuses for them.**

My point is this loved ones, if sinful people can love beyond explanation, **why does it surprise us or why should we question if God can?** And if there’s a story in the Bible that clearly shows this, it has to be the story of the parable of the Prodigal Son in **Luke 15**. The younger son asks his father to give him his portion of the family estate as an early inheritance. Once received, the son promptly sets off on a long journey to a distant land and begins to waste his fortune on wild living.

When the money runs out, a severe famine hits the country and the son finds himself in dire circumstances. He takes a job feeding pigs. He is so destitute that he even longs to eat the food assigned to the pigs. The young man finally comes to his senses, remembering his father. In humility, he recognizes his foolishness, decides to return to his father and ask for forgiveness and mercy.

And what did the Father do when the son returned? Luke 15:20 “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him”.

The father who had been watching and waiting, receives his son back with open arms of compassion.

Luke 15:22-24 “The father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.” That one parable gives us a beautiful illustration of the nature and character of God.

Romans 5:6-8 “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Now loved ones, **can you understand this?** Because in my feeble mind I can’t fully grasp what Paul is saying. Yes, I understand that I am powerless, yes, I understand that I am a sinner. But to try and grasp the concept of a holy God dying for an ungodly people. To fully grasp and understand that, while I was involved in all sorts of sinful behaviour and wasn’t even interested in God.

He sent His Son to die for me anyway! **Can any of us really grasp this? So how can God love us and punish sin at the same time?** Well again as humans we know how to do that, **don’t we? Don’t most parents lovingly discipline their children when their child does something wrong? Doesn’t God discipline His children because He loves them?**

When Jesus writes a love letter to His children in Laodicea, He says in **Revelation 3:19** “**Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline.**” You see, the greater the wrong, the more seriously it must be viewed. I mean **doesn’t that make sense to us?** And if it doesn’t make sense to us, it certainly does to God.

When God sent a flood to destroy the bulk of humanity as we read in **Genesis 6-9**, sin had filled the earth. **Genesis 6:5** “**The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.**”

Genesis 6:11 “**Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence.**”

Mankind didn’t need a gentle rebuke, during this point in time, they ate, drank, slept and dreamed evil. They didn’t need a gentle rebuke, they needed radical surgery. Liked I mentioned in the last sermon only God sees sin as it really is and we need to accept that God has to do what He must do to deal with it.

Remember when Jesus’s friend Lazarus is dying in John 11? Jesus finally gets to his house but Lazarus is already dead, Jesus asks Mary where Lazarus’ body was and so they show Him. **John 11:35** tells us that “**Jesus wept**” but **why is Jesus crying?** He’s not crying because Lazarus is dead, after all He’s going to raise him from the dead anyway. No, He’s crying because He saw what no-one else could see, He saw the full consequence that sin has on mankind.

We have to try and see sin like God sees sin. And when we do, we will finally understand that punishment of sin is God taking our sin seriously. We take crime seriously in a just society, **don’t we?** Then we should want God to take evil seriously. Otherwise we couldn’t really respect a god who doesn’t take evil seriously.

Let me ask you, **what would you think of a god who smiles at the rape of little boys and girls? Could you praise a god who grinned when thugs beat an old man to death just for fun? How would you feel about a god who got pleasure by watching children forced into evil movies and prostitution? Who wouldn’t despise a god who laughed while wicked rulers enslaved and crushed the poor? Don’t we want Someone to do something about the drug bosses who make vast fortunes out of the misery of millions?**

Listen loved ones, I for one wouldn’t want to worship a god who just yawned at all the evil that goes on in this world. A god like that shouldn’t be worshipped, oh we might be afraid of him, but we would never respect him or praise him.

Sin is an offence against God Himself and that leads Him to view it with severity. Evil is repulsive to His nature and dishonouring to His person. **1 John 4:8** “**Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.**” **Psalm 29:2** “**Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.**”

You see, that is where the problem lies, sin’s fundamental nature is that it is an offence against God.

Psalm 51:4 “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so, you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.” So, sin is offensive to God but we need to try and understand that God’s anger at sin is partly because He loves those who are being exploited by sin. And God will right all the wrongs done to the oppressed and defenceless people.

Genesis 18:25 “Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Revelation 6:9-11 “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.”

You see loved ones, God will do what is right but He will do it on His own time schedule. But as humans we don’t have to feel personal hatred against a brutal criminal to imprison him, in order to protect those he is has been cruelly abusing. The nations didn’t have to feel personal hatred for Hitler during WWII to know they had to keep him from exterminating whole nations.

Do we really think that God is some kind of hate filled lunatic, especially in the light that we know that He loves the oppressed? James 1:27 “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”

Do we really think that God is some kind of hate filled lunatic, especially in the light that we know that He loves the oppressed and will punish anyone who hurts others? Matthew 18:6+7 “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!”

Bible history is the story of how God has pursued us. It reveals mankind’s awful sinfulness again and again but it also shows us God coming after mankind. Right from the very beginning, He promised the sinful Adam and Eve that a Redeemer is coming. Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

A few years later He choose Noah and his family to bless the coming generations and saves them from the flood. Genesis 6:8 “But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.”

Genesis 7:1 “The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation.” And what did God do next? He leaves the rainbow as a permanent sign of mankind’s evil and His love for mankind.

Genesis 9:12-17 “And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.” So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

And so even today after the rain has come and you see that rainbow up in the sky, don’t go thinking, ‘wow that’s beautiful, with all its different colours’. God says that rainbow is my sign to the whole world, to remind us that mankind is sinful but I still love them anyway.

A few years later God graciously chose to bless a childless old man and his barren wife so that he would be a blessing to the whole world. Genesis 12:1+2 “The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”

After delivering His people from slavery under an evil Egyptian oppressor as recorded in Exodus 1-12. He later made Abraham's offspring into a nation at Mount Sinai. Exodus 19:5+6 "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Abraham and Israel became models of what God wanted for the whole world. And if Israel's rescue from slavery under Pharaoh teaches us anything, it teaches us about rescue from slavery under Satan and sin. Their worship in and around the tabernacle taught them and us that God wants to live in the midst of people despite their sinfulness. Their sacrificial system told them that life with God could only exist where sin was taken seriously.

Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." But since it was God who ultimately provided the sacrifices, we are taught that it is God who pursues us and them and provides what we need to have life with Him. They had an inner sanctuary in which God dwelt and which was strictly 'off-limits'.

This, and the endless sacrifices which had to be offered, taught them and us that full intimacy with God would only come later in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9:7+8 "But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning."

Hebrews 10:19+20 "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body." This tabernacle and those sacrifices foretold the day when God would tabernacle among all people in Jesus Christ.

John 1:14 "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth". And those sacrifices taught us that God would offer the sacrifice which would enable Him to forgive the ungodly and give life to those who deserve death. 1 John 2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

Remember when John the baptiser stood on the banks of the River Jordan and he saw Jesus coming towards him, what did he say? John 1:29 "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Now notice he used the word 'sin' not 'sins' and that because Jesus came to deal with the totality of sin. Sin is man's worst enemy, his greatest problem, all human wretchedness comes from a single fountain of bitter waters.

Jesus came to destroy and remove our greatest enemy in order for us to have that relationship with God again. Romans 3:23-26 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus".

Loved ones the nation of Israel was supposed to be a sign to the whole world that God loves all of mankind, not just Israel. The nation of Israel was supposed to be a form of proof, just like the rainbow, that God was still longing for loving fellowship with sinful humans. He did in the beginning and He still does today.

I know a lot of people can't stand this saying but it's certainly true, God loves the sinner but hates the sin. And that's why when you read your Bible, you read about how God wants everyone to turn to Him for forgiveness. Have you ever wondered why Jesus hasn't come back yet to end the mess this world is in? Because when we look at the sinfulness of the world today, this world has deserved a thousand floods since the first one.

So why hasn't He returned yet to bring it all to an end? 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

There's a reason why the word repentance appears 21 times in your Bible. There's a reason why the word repent appears 74 times in your Bible. The Greek word for 'repent' is 'metanoeo' and it means to think differently or reconsider.

You see God hasn't come back yet because He is patient and He doesn't want anyone to go to hell. He wants everyone to think differently about their life and where they will spend eternity. He wants everyone to reconsider their position before God. In other words, He wants you to change the direction of your life, instead of running towards sin, He wants you to run towards Him and live your life trying to please Him.

Loved ones our holy God has been chasing mankind from the very beginning. And if you're not a Christian this morning, then you need to know that He is longing to have a relationship with you. Let me encourage you to reconsider your position before God this morning. He loves you and longs to forgive you for all the sins you've ever committed against Him in the past and any sins that you will commit against Him in the future.