

# **“God Is . . . Love”**

## **Part 7 - Text: Revelation 5:9-11**

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on May 27, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** It was a powerful moment in the history of the Academy Awards. Sally Fields had just won an Oscar for her role in the 1984 movie *Places in the Heart*. Usually Oscar winners take the chance to thank a whole bunch of people or sometimes they make political statements. But Sally Fields speech revealed how needy she was. She clutched her Oscar like a two-year old girl clutches her teddy bear and blurted out, ***“I can’t deny the fact you like me—right now, you like me.”***
  - In that vulnerable moment she revealed her great craving to be loved, accepted, and approved of. She thought she found it. But she was wrong. In the days and weeks to follow she was mocked for her vulnerability.
    - The whole thing was tragic. Sally Fields was at the height of her fame, beauty, and accomplishments but really she was just a little girl looking for love.
- To be human is to crave love and acceptance. We search for it in all kinds of ways but just when we think we find it something goes wrong. Friends let us down. Parents let us down. Spouses let us down. Our kids let us down.
  - This morning we are going to look at the attribute of God’s love. The problem with talking about the love of God is that it is kind of like talking about motherhood and apple pie. No one disagrees that the Bible teaches that God is love.
    - And yet, experientially we struggle to believe it is true. God seems distant at times. There is pain and suffering in our lives. Prayers seem to go unanswered. Our experience often seems to mock the idea that God loves us. How can we know that God truly loves us?
- Love is always proved with action. Good feelings do not prove love. Action does. What will convince our hearts of God’s love is not looking for a feeling from him, but looking at how he acts. And the Bible says there is one act, above all others, that proves God’s love for us: the death of Christ.
  - 1 John 4:10 says, ***“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loves us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*** Romans 5:8 says the same thing: ***“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”***
    - So in order to understand the love of God we must understand Jesus’ death. So I want to take our time together to examine what the Bible teaches about the death of Jesus.
- Today I am praying that throughout this message, and by the end of it, you would be overwhelmed by God’s personal and particular love for you—that you would be able to stand before God and say, ***“I can’t deny the fact that you love me—you truly love me.”***
  - To do this, I want to shape the message around two questions: why did Jesus die? And how does Jesus’ death reveal God’s love?

### **WHY DID JESUS DIE?**

- First then, **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** why did Jesus die?
  - To answer this let’s take some time to dig into Revelation 5. Here John is given a picture of heaven. In this passage we find all the hosts of heaven worshipping Jesus, the Lamb. Look at verses 8-10.

- **READ 9-10** – *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,”<sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”*
- The theme of heaven’s endless worship is the death of Jesus. But I want you to note the language used here to describe the death of Jesus. The translation we are using has the word “slain.” To be slain means to be **“slaughtered.”** The Greek-English Lexicon by Arndt and Gingrich defines it like this: **“Of the killing of a person by violence”<sup>11</sup>**
  - “Slaughter” is not a pleasant word. It is a graphic word. It is a violent word. It is what you do to a lamb in the Old Testament sacrificial system. You grab its head, pull it back, and slit its throat. It is a violent and gruesome death.
    - Do not soften the impact of this language. It is not just the death of Jesus. It is the slaughter of Jesus. This verse is saying that the four living creatures and the 24 elders exalt Jesus in song because he was slaughtered.
- But it is not just the four creatures and the 24 elders that worship in this way. Watch what happens in verse 11.
  - **READ 11-14** – *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,<sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain [slaughtered], to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”<sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”<sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.*
    - Heaven’s worship is not just about Jesus in a general sense. The theme of heaven’s worship is Jesus as the slaughtered lamb.
- But that just heightens our question, **“why was Jesus slaughtered? What is the purpose of his violent and gruesome death?”**
  - The answer is in verse 9. **READ 9** – *you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*
    - So why did Jesus die? **(SHOW SLIDE 3) Jesus was slaughtered in order to purchase people for God.**
- The Bible declares that we have all turned away from God to follow our own desires. We have all sinned. Because of this the human race is cut off from God and separated from God.
  - And yet in this verse we suddenly see that not only are people restored to God, they are citizens in his kingdom, serving him and reigning with him. What happened? The answer according to this verse is that Jesus’ violent death, and specifically his blood, purchased people back to God.
    - The purpose of Jesus’ death was to purchase people for God.

## WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO BE SLAUGHTERED?

- But it is right here that so many people get confused. **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Why was such an extreme act required to bring people back to God? Why can’t God just forgive us?**
  - Do you remember when *The Passion of the Christ* came out? The big criticism was that it was just too violent. Why so much blood? Why such graphic images?

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<sup>1</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 803.

- This is extremely unique among all the religions, ideologies, and philosophies of the world. The centerpiece of Christianity is the slaughter of its hero.
- So, why was such an extreme act required to bring people back to God? I will give you the answer and then explain it: **(SHOW SLIDE 5) Since God must punish sin, Jesus stood in our place to take the punishment we deserve so that we can come back to God.**
  - God is a just God. Therefore, he must punish sin. If God does not punish sin then he is not just. Imagine a Supreme Court judge saying to a serial killer, ***“Don’t worry about your crime. I forgive you and you can go now.”*** The nation would rise up in protest.
    - In the same way if God does not judge then he is not just. If he is not just, then he is not a good God, and if he is not good then God is not worthy of your worship and adoration.
  - So, God will punish sinners. And what is the punishment for sin? It is death. Because all have sinned, all will die. But in the OT God began to reveal a way out, a way that would satisfy His justice and allow sinners to go free – it is called a sacrifice.
- In Leviticus 17 we read the following: **READ 11 – (SHOW SLIDE 6) *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.***
  - Blood is the symbol of life. Here we read that animals were to be slaughtered and have their blood spilt. Why were they to do this? Two themes emerge in this verse:
    - The first is substitution. The animal’s life is given instead of the person’s life. The second theme is punishment. The animal is violently slaughtered and its blood spilt. It is punished in the place of the person.
- So God has provided a way for the sword of justice to fall, not on the heads of people, but on a substitute. That was the point of the sacrificial system. It upholds justice and yet allows a guilty human to go free.

## SIN OFFERINGS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- Let’s dig deeper into this. In Leviticus chapter 4 God declares what needs to happen when various members of the community sin. As we read watch for these two themes: the animal as a substitute for the person and the punishment, which is always described as slaughter. First, he talks about a priest sinning.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 7) READ 3-4 – *if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering. <sup>4</sup> He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill [Hebrew = “to slaughter”] the bull before the LORD.***
    - The laying on of hands preceded the slaying of the victim. This pictures the transference of the sin and guilt of the person to his or her substitute. In this case, the animal is slaughtered in place of the priest.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 8) READ 22-24, 26b - *When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, <sup>23</sup> or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish, <sup>24</sup> and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill [“slaughter”] it in the place where they kill [“slaughter”] the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering. . . . So the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.***

- **(SHOW SLIDE 9) READ 27-29, 31b - <sup>27</sup>“If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any one of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, <sup>28</sup>or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring for his offering a goat, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. <sup>29</sup>And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill [“slaughter”] the sin offering in the place of burnt offering. . . . And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.**
- These sin offerings happened regularly. Once a year all of the sins of the people were dealt with in the same way. This day was called the Day of Atonement.
  - On that day two goats were used. Listen to what happened to the first goat. **READ 16:15 - (SHOW SLIDE 10) Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.** This shows the punishment side. The goat is slaughtered in place of the people.
    - Now watch what happened to the second goat called “the scapegoat.” **READ 21-22 - (SHOW SLIDE 11) And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. <sup>22</sup>The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.**
  - This pictures the goat as the substitute for the people’s sins. The sins are carried away.
- The OT sacrifices all clearly pointed to the need of an animal substitute to bear the punishment and sins of people. But then in Isaiah it is prophesied that a servant of the Lord would come. In chapter 53 this man is likened to a **“lamb led to the slaughter”** and that God will crush him and cause him to suffer, making his life a **“guilt offering.”** But who is this servant? People wondered about this for centuries.
  - The enigma stood until a prophet named John saw Jesus walking by a river and proclaimed, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”** The mystery of God hidden for ages began to unfold.
- Jesus spoke of himself and his mission in these terms of saving a people through His own sacrificial death.
  - He said, **“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many”**
  - In Matthew 16 we read, **“Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many thing...and that he must be killed”**

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF JESUS CHRIST**

- And then the hour came. Jesus has been flogged. His skin hangs like ribbons off his back. He cannot even carry his own cross because he is so weak. Like a lamb being led to its death, Jesus is led to the hill of Golgotha. Spikes are violently driven through his flesh.
  - Just as the sins of Israel were transferred onto the animals, God now transfers the sins of all his people onto his Son.
    - In the blackness of that day, it is like God Almighty placed his hands upon the head of his Son and began to confess over him the sins of all his people.

- What was it like? Did God say, ***“And I confess over you the sins of Barton Priebe, for all the wickedness in his heart, for his impatience, for his lack of gentleness, for not showing love to all he meets, for his envy, for his lust, for his love of the world, for his rebellion against me.”***
  - And having transferred the sins of untold millions people from every tribe, nation, and tongue, Jesus the holy and innocent lamb of God is now considered by God to be sin: ***“God made him who had no sin to be sin.”*** Having been made sin, God brings the judgement that is due to sin upon Jesus.
    - Jesus, the Lamb of God is slaughtered. His blood spills down the cross. He takes the punishment that we deserve. So in the death of Jesus, God’s justice is upheld. Sin has been punished. But, praise be to God, we do not have to suffer punishment for Jesus was punished in our place.

## THE LOVE OF GOD

- Let’s wrap this up with our second question, **(SHOW SLIDE 12) how does Jesus’ death reveal God’s love?**
  - It is revealed in that God went to such extreme lengths to bring us back to himself. It is not that we were so loveable that God loved us. No, we were his enemies. It is not that we were so deserving that God loved us. No, we were guilty and undeserving.
    - What makes the love of God shine so brightly is that we were so underserving and yet he was willing to go to such extreme lengths to bring us back to himself. Our sin was so bad that it required the death of Jesus Christ and yet God was willing to give up his Son and Jesus was willing to die.
- So the message is not clean yourself up and God will love you. Message is that while you were dirty with sin, God gave his Son to cleanse you. Message is not make yourself worthy and God will love you. The message is that you are totally unworthy but that God set his love upon you.
  - We are far more sinful than we think and yet we are far more loved than we ever dreamed. The proof of God’s love is the action of what he did to seek us out and die for us while we were sinners.
- Pastor Matt Chandler tells a powerful story about taking a non-Christian friend named Kim to a church service where the preacher was talking about sex: ***“The preacher took the stage, and disaster ensued. I don’t know how else to describe the sermon. There was very little Bible in it. He gave us a lot of statistics about STDs. There was a lot of, ‘You don’t want syphilis, do you?’ and, ‘It’s all fun and games until you’ve got herpes on your lip.’ And in the middle of all this moralistic fearmongering, his big illustration was to take out a single red rose. He smelled the rose dramatically on stage, caressed its petals, and talked about how beautiful this rose was and how it had been fresh cut that day. In fact, he said, it was such a beautiful rose that he wanted all of us to see and smell it. So he threw the rose out into the crowd, and he encouraged everyone to pass it around. We were sitting toward the back of the auditorium of a thousand, and it made its way to us, all while he kept preaching. As he neared the end of his message, he asked for the rose back. And, of course, when he got it back in his hands, it was broken and drooping, and the petals were falling off. He held up this now-ugly rose for all to see, and his big finish was this: ‘Now who in the world would want this? Who would want this rose now? Would you be proud of this rose? Is this rose lovely?’ His words and his tone were merciless.***
  - ***About a week or two later, Kim didn’t show up for class... She had a dark past, and I wondered if she had fallen back into some of her old habits. Then I got a phone call from a woman who claimed to be Kim’s mom. Kim had been in an accident and had***

***been in the hospital right across the street from the university. So I hung up the phone with her mom, and I walked over to her hospital room. She was all bandaged up, and her face was still swollen...In the middle of our conversation, seemingly out of nowhere, she asked me, 'Do you think I'm a dirty rose?' My heart sank inside of me, and I began to explain to her that the whole weight of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that Jesus wants the rose! It's Jesus's desire to save, redeem, and restore the dirty rose.'***<sup>2</sup>

- Behold the love of God for you! It is while you were dirty in your sin that he gave his blood to cleanse you. It is while you were his enemy that he died for you. It is while you were ignoring him that he was pursuing you.
  - Why do you doubt the love of God? What else can he do to prove his love for you? He has given up his Son for you. His Son has voluntarily suffered a violent and blood death for you so that you will not have to face the judgement and wrath of God.
    - What else can he do to prove his love? Here is the love you have always craved. Here is the love that will never let you go.
- This is why we sing,
  - ***My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly trust is Jesus' name***
    - What does "sweetest frame" mean? Frame is an old English way of speaking about a condition. So we are singing I dare not trust my sweetest experience of life or the sweetest things of life. This is not where we rest our hope. We rest it in Jesus.
- And so we cry out in worship, ***Christ alone, Cornerstone, Weak made strong in the Savior's love.***
  - We reflect upon the death of Christ and sing, ***My sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, oh my soul.***
    - Or in the simple words of the old Sunday school song. ***"Gone, gone, gone, gone, yes my sins are gone. Now my soul is free and in my hearts' a song. Buried in the deepest sea, yes that's good enough for me. I shall live eternally, praise God my sins are G-O-N-E, gone."***
- If you are not a Christian, then listen to this good news. Your sins can be forgiven. You can be reconciled to God. How do you do that? Let me conclude with a prayer that you can pray.
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 13)**
    - **Dear God,**  
**I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by you. I don't deserve your love or the gift of eternal life. I am guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you. I need forgiveness.**  
**Thank you for sending your Son to die for me that I may be forgiven.**  
**Thank you that he rose from the dead to give me new life.**  
**Please forgive me and change me, that I may live with Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. Amen.**

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Jared Wilson, *Gospel Deeps*, Kindle Edition, Location 2788.