

Matt Chandler tells a story about a time when he was legitimately angry at a pastor. The pastor came out and said, "I want to talk to you about sex." He then took this rose, smelled it and showed how pretty it was. He tossed the rose out to the congregation and told them to smell the rose, to touch the petals and experience the beauty of the rose. Then he began to embark on what was in Matt's words, "the worst, most horrific handlings of what sex is and isn't that I ever sat through." It was fear mongering at best. "You don't want syphilis do you, everyone's smiling and having a good time until there is herpes on your lip." Then the pastor asked where his rose was. Some teen brought up the rose and it was in horrible condition. The petals were falling off the stem was broke, and the big crescendo of the pastor was to hold up the rose and ask, "who would want this rose." Matt says he never quite felt anger like that because he wanted to shout out, Jesus Christ wants that rose – that's the point of gospel! That he made him who had no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God. That while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

We all love a good story – the most precious is the gospel. It is the song and story of our redeemer!

As part of our sermon series, the past two weeks we looked at.

- 1.) the big picture of God's eternal story... Creation, Fall, Redemption ("in Christ")
- 2.) "my tree" in the "forest" of God's story... (battle for heart, family, church)

Today... We look at the heart of the story... The Gospel

GOSPEL = GOD GIVING OF HIMSELF

"God is the Gospel" by John Piper. The gospel is nothing less than God's gift of himself to us! God has always been giving of himself to us even from the beginning (creation).

God gave us.....?

- His Fellowship (why did he create in his image? Why was he concerned that of all creation there was none like the man who he had made (he understood the joy of fellowship).
- His Creation to enjoy – gave man authority over all that he called good)

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." Gen 1:29-30 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

- His love

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

THE FALL OF MAN FROM WHAT? FROM FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Even as God was giving of himself in creation he knew that soon – the very things he called good and very good would become bad and very bad. [*Illustration of a judge who sentences a criminal and then gives his own life for the criminal*] Who could of known except God himself that as judge of the world he would essentially come around from the judge's bench, take of his robe and offer his own life in exchange for ours.

Satan struck a blow to God but it was only a blow. Satan took what was good and very good and corrupted it. In a sense he put it in bondage to sin and death. But what of God – all that was made came from the loins of God – it was God giving of himself.

- God's love did not change (**For God so loved the world that he gave**)
- We still were allowed to enjoy His creation though now it was tarnished.

- What Satan did destroy though was the fellowship we had with God. Fellowship with God is life in the light – anything else is darkness.

At the fall of man darkness covered the earth as God was separated from his creation – the very things he had given birth to (so to speak). **2 Cor 6:14-15 For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?** God is too holy to be associated with darkness. In God's kingdom there is only light, darkness has no place.

CLUES TO THE MYSTERY

All the creatures of the heavenly realms wondered what God would do next. Man had fallen but what now? Surely God had something up his sleeve to save his creation but what? This was God's big mystery for generations. **1 Peter 1:10-12 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed** to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Have you ever read or watched a mystery where you tried to figure out all the details. Personal note: boss @ printshop was brilliant at figuring out mysteries.

From the moment of the fall God began to reveal clues about his plan for salvation:

Adam & Eve – Man rebels and his relationship with God is broken. Satan seems victorious

Gen 3:15> And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

Abraham – God calls out Abraham as his own and begins securing to himself a people known by His name

Gen 22:18> Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed (a shadow of things to come, i.e. Christians)

Moses – God leads his people from captivity and gives them an inheritance

Duet 18> God will raise up a prophet like me from among your own brothers (a shadow of things to come- Jesus)

Samuel – God establishes a kingdom of his own (a shadow of things to come – an eternal kingdom)

Sam 7:15> Your house & your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'

Everyone from Noah to the last of the prophets in the NT shed light on God's mystery. They cast a shadow of what is to come, or rather, who is to come. **We know the stories but have we learned the lessons?** Do we understand what God was really trying to communicate to his people who have been blinded by sin.

Even those we call Minor Prophets had a big role in God's story, the proclaimed the mysteries of God. (Habakkuk 3:17-18). "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas." (2:14). AND "though the fig tree does not bud and there be no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

GOD'S MYSTERY REVEALED. THE CLIMAX OF OUR REDEMPTION STORY

When God came to earth as the man Jesus Christ, It took the apostles a while before they really understood God's story and recognized Jesus as God's plan for salvation. Filled with the Spirit of God they then began to proclaim the story to all people. This was a story of life to them. No longer were they under the heavy burden of the law and no longer was death the end but now, death was only the beginning of life in Christ. "For me to live is Christ but to die is gain. Phil 1:21" Jesus Christ had conquered death and provided a way for men and women to again be reconciled to the God they had so long been at enmity with.

- Fellowship was restored.

1 Cor 1:9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

- God's creation can now live and walk in fellowship with God (the light)

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Thus the mystery of God was revealed and fellowship with God could again be restored. God had given himself once again. And once again mankind is given a choice. They can rebel by rejecting God's gift of himself or they can accept the gift. But how does one accept the gift of God. That is exactly what they Jews asked Peter when he first preached to them on Pentecost. The disciples clear answer is stated that question is stated in many places throughout scripture but let's look specifically at. Acts 20:21-24 I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus. 22 "And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, 23 except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. 24 But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God.

1. Repent of sin
2. Turn to God
3. Have faith in Jesus! (God came to earth and died for man but was resurrected)

You see God is truly the Gospel. If we will accept God we must repent of sin and turn to Him. We must then trust in the redemption He has given us in Jesus Christ. Do you trust that there is no other way to be reconciled to God? Do you trust that in Christ alone there is freedom from sin and death?

WE ARE BEARERS OF GOD'S GIFT OF HIMSELF – THE GOSPEL

What does this look like in our lives as we continue the story?

- Do you practice Christian hospitality @ church and in your homes?
We practice hospitality for two reasons
 1. We are citizens of heaven and thus we act like it
 2. We know that hospitality is the Velcro that keeps people around as we disciple them
- Do you look for opportunities to "make mention that his name is exalted?" (Isaiah 12:4)
If you recognize that God has given himself to you – what praise have you for him!
- Do you pray for boldness in your witness (and even use words)?
In our culture it is not popular to share this message of life with others but who do you fear more – God or men? We must pray for boldness and share with our neighbor that they too can have fellowship with God.
- Do you live in God's presence...Song: "This is the air I breath... your holy presence, living in me."
Walking in the light. 1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
- How do you invest your...
 - Time?
 - Talents?
 - Treasures?
 - Conversations?