

THE TREASURES OF THE CROSS

Part Five: The Logic of Forgiveness

May 17, 2020

Review from week one: six observations from the Gospels/Acts

- The cross was necessary
 - The cross was voluntary
 - The cross was some kind of rescue
 - The cross dealt with forgiveness of sins
 - The cross continued and completed the OT story
 - The cross resulted in a fresh kind of authority for Jesus
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Review from week two: six models of thinking about the cross

- Ransom
 - Satisfaction
 - Penal substitution
 - Blood sacrifice
 - Christus Victor
 - Model of love
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Review from week three: The why of the whole creation project

A. God, having no needs, created us simply out of the overflow of Trinitarian love. More specifically, I suggested we were created as a lavish expression of love for the Son from the Father. More specifically, I suggested, were created to be a “suitable bride,” or, if you will, “a chosen beloved,” for the Son, which means to say we were made for an intimate, unique, special, partnering relationship with Jesus, and this was indeed the extravagant expression of the Father’s love.

B. For the chosen beloved to grow into a love worthy of the Son, there would need to be a process for that “potential innocent love” to grow into “actual mature love” through the

test of freedom--of being able to choose otherwise. And so the world was created as the greenhouse for the chosen beloved's love to grow real--or not.

Review from week four: what went wrong.

A. The death that comes to Adam and Eve is an intrinsic consequence of idolatry as opposed to an imposed legal consequence.

B. Death has three major components to it: separation/alienation from God, corruption/pollution/decay, and enslavement to dark powers. The chart below shows how death is manifested through the story of the Garden of Eden and through the story of Israel:

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE SAGA OF THE CHOSEN BELOVED

LIFE Gen 1-2	DEATH	AFTER FALL Gen 3	In Egypt Ex 1-5	In Israel Josh- Klngs	Failure Again Kings-Prophets
Intimate Relationship with God	Distance and separation from God	Hide from God. Exiled from the garden.	Hundreds of years of divine silence.	God dwells in Tabernacle and Temple	God leaves the Temple, Israel goes into exile.
Filled with goodness, in and out	Pollution, stain, decay, corruption, stink	Experience shame. Cover nakedness.	Vocation as brick makers in the mud.	Animal sacrifice cleanses people and land	Sacrificial system is destroyed, rebuilt, corrupted; injustice rampant.
Reigning with authority and power	Enslavement and subjugation to dark powers	Oppressed by birth pain and field thorn.	Slaves under the brutality of Pharaoh.	Political autonomy when idol-free	Assyria, Babylon take down Israel. Greeks, others, leading to Rome.

Today's Thesis: The Cross was Rescue and NOT Transaction

Jesus' death on the cross was a divine rescue operation to reconcile us back to God by removing and healing the Chosen Beloved from the intrinsic consequence of sin, that being DEATH (and that having the three aspects of separation from God, corruption, and enslavement to dark powers). As such, it was an act that demonstrated God's forgiveness of the Chosen Beloved and, because of that forgiveness, Jesus' embracing of the cross as the great rescue operation.

Said another way, the cross was the expression of God's forgiveness of the Chosen Beloved rather than the mechanism by which He could then forgive the Chosen Beloved.

Said another way, the cross did not procure God's forgiveness, it proved that it had already been granted.

Said another way, on the cross Jesus was not paying a penalty of punishment, or satisfying the debt of God's offended honor SO THAT God could then be freed up to justly forgive the Chosen Beloved (as He wanted to do, but couldn't do unless a payment for sin were made). Rather because God chose to forgive, Jesus went to the cross to rescue the Chosen Beloved out of the irreversible clutches of sin-caused death, delivering the Chosen Beloved back to the Father, cleansing and healing the Chosen Beloved from the corruption and decay of sin-caused death, and defeating the dark powers of sin, Satan, and death in a decisive act of judgment and victory over evil and accomplishing the reconciliation of humans to God.

Said another way, logically God's forgiveness precedes the cross, though the whole package of forgiveness and rescue is intimately tied together in the Scriptures.

Rooted in Scriptures that emphasize God's move for us while we were still in our sin--

*In Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them: **2 Cor 5:19***

*But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved: **Eph 2:4,5***

*While we were still weak, while we were still sinners, while we were enemies--Christ died and reconciled us to God: **Rom 5:6-11***

Basically, my approach is to forging together the models of Ransom, Christus Victor, Blood Sacrifice, and Model of LOVE, while I am resisting the Satisfaction theory and the Penal substitution theory, and the primary reason is that I do not see the idea that God's wrath or God's honor needed to be appeased by some mechanism in order to forgive us and rescue us. Rather, God is free to judge whom He will and free to forgive whom He will according to the dictates of His own wisdom rooted in His essential nature as love.

Overview of How This Works:

IN the beginning Adam and Eve, the Chosen Beloved, betray God. God's reaction? He comes looking for them. "Where are you" the seeking God asks. It is Adam and Eve who have pulled away, who are hiding, because the intrinsic consequences of death have begun to take hold. The curses (intrinsic consequence, not punishments) are spelled out. Next, promises to crush the head of the serpent (the enemy that had seduced and captured the Chosen Beloved) and then He clothes them with garments. I see this first reaction of God toward human sin as paradigmatic of God's posture toward the sinful world. Seeking, clothing, and defending.

Notice next God's freedom to judge and forgive. Tower of Babel, the whole world during Noah's time, the city of Sodom. God Who is free to judge also is free to not judge for the "sake of 10 righteous." (Gen 18:32). The whole OT sacrificial system was set up for the sake of the people, not because God needed a mechanism by which He could forgive (since we know the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin: Hebrews 10:4). It was always forgiveness offered freely. God forgives Israel over and over again when they cry out to Him. God forgives Nineveh to Jonah's disappointment. In other words God is not bound by a system which dictates when He can or cannot forgive. But some will say, He is always congruent with Himself-His love and His justice are two sides of the same coin. Yes, I say. Both work together perfectly. Pictured perfectly in **Hosea Chapter 11** where we see initial love, betrayal, intrinsic consequence, God's anger and His love under control, His free choice to forgive.

God, Who created the Chosen Beloved out of the overflow of love, Who reacted to the fall with great compassion and initiative, Who has always retained utter freedom in His

choice to judge and to forgive, faced with the on-going sin of the Chosen Beloved in the world and in Israel (the Chosen Beloved Representative who was tasked to bring the world back around to loving God), sent the Son into the world as the Second Adam, as Israel's Messiah, and in both frames, Jesus fulfills the destiny of the Chosen Beloved as a true and faithful human, as the Chosen Beloved had been meant to be, through His obedience to the Father and His sinless life.

Seeing that His love has never changed, and although His wrath has certainly been aroused by the Chosen Beloved's idolatry and betrayal, God, **for the sake of Jesus**, Who lived the out the destiny of the Chosen Beloved with perfect faithfulness, chooses to forgive the Chosen Beloved out of utter His freedom to do so. God chooses to forgive the Chosen Beloved for the sake of Jesus, (just as He would've have relented from the judgement of Sodom for the sake of ten). Jesus' faithfulness as the true human connects with God's love for humanity and out of that connection God says I freely and generously choose to forgive the Chosen Beloved of its long history of betrayal and idolatry.

But God is congruent and plays by the rules He set up for reality. Death was the necessary and inevitable consequence of idolatrous betrayal, and the Chosen Beloved was firmly in the grip of this consequence. God was free to forgive, but forgiveness itself (as we see in human relationships) does not magically take away the intrinsic consequences of offenses. Those must play out, just as an apple falling from a tree does not stop until it hits the ground.

So Jesus, the Second Adam and Israel's Messiah, representing the Chosen Beloved in both frames, also chooses to represent the Chosen Beloved in her plight of the death-grip. He trades places with the Chosen Beloved. This He can do for He is truly human, the Second Adam, and He is truly Israel, the Servant of Isaiah 42-53. Here is the great substitution: Jesus takes our place, bears our intrinsic consequence of death in all of its aspects. The purpose of this exchange is multiple: it is compassion, Jesus tasting death for us so that we could be delivered from its horror (Hebrews 2:9). It is rescue--untangling us from the clutches of sin and death's power (Hebrews 2:15). It is a cleansing and healing of all the death effects that had permeated the Chosen Beloved (Hebrews 10:22). It is a snatching the Chosen Beloved and delivering her back to God (Ephesians 2:6, 2 Cor 5:19). It is a victorious judgment over the powers of death and sin and Satan from inside their camp (Hebrews 2:14). All of this is possible because death could not hold on to Jesus (Acts 2:24), because, though He was the sin bearer (2 Cor 5:21), He remained forever sinless and perfect. But we will look in more detail at this rescue operation next week.

This parallels the first Exodus story. This is the new exodus, rescue from bondage. This is what the word “redemption” would have conjured up for the writers of the New Testament. This is the new Passover. Remember, the Passover and Exodus was not a penalty-paying exercise for God’s people. The Passover Lamb was a substitute which gave protection from the Angel of Death. Follow the analogy here, Jesus as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world is a substitute upon which death falls so that the Chosen Beloved can flee the land of slavery and enter into relationship with God away from the effects of death.

Now, let us challenge my thesis and see if it can stand the test of scrutiny:

Can God just forgive us without a condition met, a payment of debt?

I would argue that God’s manner of forgiveness would need to be congruent with the way Jesus taught us to forgive, right? God wouldn’t operate on a different principle than the very way He would teach His followers. Note that in Jesus teaching about forgiveness, the one thing you don’t see is tit for tat, or forgiveness based on conditions met. Consider:

Jesus forgiving the soldiers nailing Him to the cross: Luke 23:34

As we forgive those who sin against us: Matt 5:12

Telling Peter to forgive seven times seventy along with the parable of the debtor who withholds forgiveness: Matt 18: 21-35

Or look at the way God’s forgiveness is characterized in the teaching of Jesus, where the parable of the prodigal son, the Father runs to the son before any apology is given in Luke 15. Or the Sermon on the Mount, where the justification to love one’s enemies is based on the character of the Father who sends rain on just and unjust: Matt 5:43-48

Does this approach tarnish God’s holiness?

Not in any way. As we shall see, the cross will function to cleanse the pollution of sin and it will decisively judge evil and sin. The cross will preserve the holiness of God even as it offers the Chosen Beloved the gift of being made holy with fine linen, bright and pure (Revelation 19:8)

Does this approach minimize God’s justice?

Realize that intrinsic consequence is purer justice than legal imposed penalty. Intrinsic consequence is “reality’s justice system.” And the Chosen Beloved has suffered just consequence for her sin. And this is why the cross is necessary. The intrinsic consequence cannot just be swept away magically! The justice of reality is immutable.

Death must be suffered. God would be unjust if He changed in mid-game the very fabric of reality in which no death would come about as a result of the idolatrous betrayal of the God of Life. But that doesn't even make sense. God's reality is God's reality and justice is embedded within it. This is why it was necessary for Jesus, if the Chosen Beloved were to be rescued, to bear the full weight of the intrinsic consequence. And this intrinsic consequence remains in place for all who will reject the provision of entering into the life of the rescued Chosen Beloved. If some should insist on remaining out, the intrinsic reality of "out" will always be what it is: separation, corruption, and enslavement.

Does this approach ignore the reality of God's wrath?

Not at all. True love is angered by unlove. It must be. The passion of love rises up against all that would hurt or smear love. God is utterly opposed to all that is evil and against love. His wrath is real, but His wrath is not the same as human wrath, which often takes over the will and distorts things. God's wrath is fierce, but under His own perfect management. He is not controlled by it, rather He controls it perfectly, and has no need for some mechanism external to Himself to control or appease it. Remember the Hosea 11.

But doesn't the OT sacrificial system show that God needs payments prior to extending forgiveness?

That is too simplistic of a formula. The OT sacrificial system had many layers of meaning. "Sacrifice" is better translated as "offering", and was used to maintain relationship with God both by gift-giving as worship and as a cleansing system. But it was not a penal system. Animals were not being punished in place of the offerer. Wright notes that the animals were not sacrificed on the altar, as in other religions of deity appeasement, but rather they were executed outside, and the blood-brought into the tabernacle or temple for sprinkling or burning. The life-blood of animals was a symbol meant to cover over the places where death touched, and it served to both remind and help people that they were in a designated "life-zone" that needed to be maintained through diligence and obedience. Interestingly, sin sacrifices were for inadvertent sins, not intentional egregious sins, for which there was not symbolic sacrifice, only punishment.

What about the NT language of being justified by His blood? (Romans 5:9) Doesn't that suggest that the death of Jesus was the technical mechanism that allowed God to declare us righteous?

The word group in the NT that is typically translated "*righteousness, justice, justified*" has been demonstrated by many scholars today to bear primarily a relational sense as

opposed to a forensic or legal sense. Thus “to be made righteous” or “to be justified” is “to be put in right relationship” with God as opposed to being made “morally good.” To be *justified* has the deeper sense of *being put in the right*. Though I am logically distinguishing the Father’s forgiveness as preceding the cross’ rescue mission, they are all to be seen as one whole act in which the Chosen Beloved is made right again--forgiven and rescued--a total operation that was begun in the Father’s decision to forgive the Chosen Beloved and finished by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What about Romans 3:25 in which the Bible says “Whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood”? That word means to appease wrath. Doesn’t that suggest Jesus’ death as the specific mechanism that turned God’s righteous wrath into forgiveness?

“Propitiation” translates the Greek word “hilasterion” which technically is the “mercy seat” in the Holy of Holies (see Hebrews 9:5), the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, on which, once a year the blood of the sin-offering is sprinkled for the unintentional sins of the people, “cleaning” the place of meeting, where God and Israel could continue to meet. Whether this means God’s anger or wrath is propitiated (“appeased”) or whether this means the sin-pollution is cleaned up (“expiated”) is a matter of trying to interpret how the blood sacrifice was working. In our approach we continue to see the cross as cleansing the Chosen Beloved from sin’s death-pollution, making intimacy with God doable (as His fierce Life would eradicate any sin/death particles in His presence)

Is this a new and novel approach?

My emphasis on the cross as rescue and not transaction is more in line with the Church's first centuries’ emphasis on the cross as **ransom** (the first model we talked about). Remember Anselm’s satisfaction theory didn’t come around until 1100 AD and the penal substitution didn’t come around until the Reformation and beyond 1500/1600s. While penal substitution is the primary model I have grown up with, our Covenant heritage actually has its root elsewhere, primarily influenced by the great Swedish preacher P.P Waldenstrom, who in 1872 argued against the idea of penal substitution in which we asked “where is it written that there is some change in God?” Rather in the cross God is reconciling the world to Himself. In other words, God is not needing something in order to be able to extend forgiveness and reconcile with humans. The thing that was needed was for humans to be changed, rescued, cleansed, freed, and thus reconciled to Him who has always been poised over us with the seeking, clothing, defending posture we saw at the very beginning when the Chosen Beloved first fell into death.

Next Week's Wrap-Up: The Rescue Operation Explained

Jesus, on the cross, as the Chosen Beloved's representative (the second Adam, and as Israel's Messiah), sent by the Father's forgiving love, switches places with the Chosen Beloved, bearing in Himself the intrinsic consequence of her idolatry (DEATH), and in so doing, destroys the very power of DEATH itself and releases the Chosen Beloved from the three aspects of DEATH that had bound her, reconciling the Chosen Beloved to God where formerly there was alienation, bringing cleansing and purity where there was pollution and stain, and bringing freedom to worship and obey God where there was enslavement to dark powers.

Death Manifestation	MECHANISM	Result After the Cross
Alienation, separation from God	Jesus enters Death where we are trapped and carried us up to God and laid us in His waiting arms	Reconciliation, adoption. reinstatement of the Chosen Beloved's created destiny
Pollution, corruption, stain, decay, death-stink	Jesus life-blood swallows up and thus erases the death stain left by sin and heals the wounds	The Chosen Beloved is made clean, pure, guilt-free, given a good conscience, holy.
Enslavement to dark powers: devil, sin, flesh	Jesus "Trojan-horsed" death and gutted it with the burning sword of self-sacrificial love	Freedom to live for God, worship Him, serve Him, and love Him as appropriate for the Chosen Beloved