



Living on the wrong side of the cross!
(Grace)

I thought this morning rather than just preach a sermon, I would basically sing you a song. But I would first explain how I came to write the song. And use this as an opportunity to remind us all of an essential truth in the Christian faith, particularly in our walk with Jesus.

Early last year we went and had a meal with some Christians we had met at a local Christian meeting. He at that time was the pastor of local independent evangelical church not far from Maldon a local town. However they have since moved north to be near one of their children. After the meal we retired to their lounge to have a cup of coffee or tea, as you do. As we were sitting in the lounge he said to me, **'Why do so many Christians live on the wrong side of the cross?'**

Now I wasn't sure what he meant. When I am not sure what people mean, most of the time I ask them. In fact I feel that during sermons and talks in churches if we don't understand something, we should be able to interrupt and say, **'Excuse me pastor/vicar, what does that mean? Can you explain it more simply so that I can understand it?'** So feel free to interrupt. But not too much or we may not get home for lunch!

Anyway I said to him what do you mean?

And this is more or less what he said, or at least it is what he was getting at.

So let's draw a time line with Before Christ, (BC) on the left and After Christ, (AD) on the right with the cross at the centre of history. *(The diagram is at the end of this sermon).* Before Christ came we have the Old Testament period. And as you know Testament is another word for covenant. A covenant is an agreement between 2 parties. In those times it would have been an agreement between 2 equal parties in power and status. But almighty God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob entered into a covenant with these people.

Basically God said, 'If you want a relationship or friendship with me' then you need to do certain things and keep lots of rules. The first 5 books of the Bible are called 'the Law'. They contain many rules that the people needed to keep. So the people needed to do things. It was all about doing. One of these activities was to make sacrifices to God. These were sacrifices of animals. Sheep were particularly popular as a sacrificial animal in those days. And the place to make the sacrifices were in the temple that was based in Jerusalem in the country of Judah.

I'm sure that this is all very familiar to most of you. For if we went to Sunday School we would have learnt many of these things. It is important to remember that this Old Covenant arrangement is a shadow or representation in a sense of what was to come.



But then the most momentous event in history, Jesus is born. His birth is amazing in itself. Here is God who created the universe appearing in his world as a helpless baby. I don't think we dwell on this enough at Christmas time. God had appeared in human form. One of the technical words you may hear used is incarnation, which is not a type of milk! It comes from the Greek *en carne* which means in the flesh. It is short way of saying that Jesus was both God and a man in the one person. There is much this says to us, but that is not what I want to dwell on this morning.

The first reason that Jesus came to earth was to show us clearly what God is like. In the Old Testament people didn't have a very clear picture of what God was like. Prophets would from time to time speak to the people on behalf of God and as part of this God would reveal what he was like. But it was very much like a very dim and distant view of God.

Towards the end of his time on earth Jesus was asked by Philip,

Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.

John 14:8 (NIV)

I can just hear the exasperation in Jesus verse, who has taught these guys for three years and still they haven't got it. It is easy for us to think what a bunch of thicko's but are we any better despite all we now know with the whole of the Bible available to us. Any way Jesus answers:

Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

John 14:9 (NIV)

So Jesus clearly says he that has seen my has seen the Father. That was one of the reasons he came to earth. So if people say to us, '**How do you know what God is like?**' Tell them to look at Jesus. Read a good modern translation of one of the gospels such as Mark and as you look at Jesus life and teaching you will see God.

But the most important reason Jesus came to earth was to deal with the problem of our poor relationship with God. Without spending too much time on it the problem was caused by mankind thinking it knew better than God and could do it's own thing. This is the story of Adam and Eve in the garden eating the forbidden fruit. Not an apple as I am sure you know. We call this sin. Though most of the society around us won't understand this word at all well. So maybe when explaining the gospel or good news of Jesus say that he deals with the selfishness and self-centredness that is in us all.

Jesus died on the cross and rose again bodily on the third day, to begin a New Testament, or New Covenant effectively a new agreement between God and people. Jesus said in one of his last meetings with his disciples:

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26:28 (NIV)

He didn't say new covenant, but it was definitely not part of the old covenant hence he was bringing in a new covenant.



The key word to this new covenant is the word Grace. It comes from the Greek word charis (χάρις), which is used in the New Testament. Charis basically means gift. The good news of this new covenant, is that God gives us life in Christ as a gift. He gives us a direct, personally relationship with himself freely. We do not have to work at it or do anything to make it come about, apart from if you like letting it flow through our faith.

Above all there are no rules to keep. We are no longer under the law. We do not have to offer any sacrifices to have this close personal and warm relationship with God. We do not have to work at it or make a great effort. All we need to do is to remain resting in Jesus to enjoy our relationship with God and the life that flows from him into our lives on a daily basis.

We do not need a building that we have to visit to offer sacrifices as the Jews did with their temple in Jerusalem. We do have buildings but they are not a temple they are not really churches. I am sure you know that the church is a bunch of people, like us here today. Last time I came to Mayland Baptist church I preached on three models of the church.

If there is a temple in the new covenant it is our bodies. As Paul says that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We don't meet together to in anyway bring about our relationship with God but in order to encourage each other in our faith in Jesus. We also use these opportunities when we come together to build up and strengthen our faith.

What my friend was saying was that so many Christians go back to living on the wrong side of the cross. Here we are under grace, where Jesus has done all the work to bring about this free gift of a relationship with God, and we go back to trying to earn it. I know I have fallen back into this sort of thinking.

What happens is this, we have a good week, we have read our Bibles regularly and said our prayers faithfully. Overall we think we have been pretty good and not done anything too bad. So we think to ourselves well God really likes me and I have a close relationship with me.

But just think of those days when we have had a bad week. We know we haven't been faithful in reading our Bible or saying our prayers. We know that we have done some bad things. Maybe we lost our temper with someone or said some very un-kind words. Oh dear we think God can't really like me very much. I don't have a close warm relationship with him.

We are effectively going back to the other side of the cross, to the old covenant, where we earn our friendship with God. This is totally the opposite of the good news of Jesus.

Jesus died and rose again so that we can have this close relationship with God no matter what we have done.

Think of some of the hymns we have sung.

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.¹*

¹ 'Just as I am' by Charlotte Elliot



Or in the hymn 'Rock of Ages' we sing:

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly:
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.²

A friend of mine used to say, 'Christian don't tell lies we sing them'. For we sing these great truths just as I am and then try and work like mad to be accepted by God. Or nothing in my hand I bring, and we try and bring all our good deeds to try and get God to accept us.

We need to get deep in our hearts that God accepts us because Jesus died and rose again. We don't need to do anything, in fact we can't do anything, to make God accept us and have a deep and close relationship with us. He loves us so much that he allowed his only son to die for us and everybody in the world, that he might have this close relationship or friendship. Remember in the family prayer that we call the Lord's Prayer, we address him as Father, Abba father, you can't get any closer than that.

If I had a key verse for today that we all need to remember it is what Paul writes near the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians. He writes in Chapter 2, verses 8 & 9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no-one can boast. Ephesians 2: 8 & 9 (NIV)

So Paul says it is by Grace that we have been saved. He also points out that this grace flows through or comes to us through faith. But then notice he says this faith is not from us. It is the gift of God, not by works.

Many Christians, quite often of the American variety on TV, seem to tell us to build up our faith. Quite often we can try and build up our faith by our efforts. We will make all sorts of efforts to build up our faith. We will read the Bible extensively or we will pray passionately and for long times. All in the effort to build up our faith that we may feel is very weak. Now I am not saying that reading the Bible or praying are not worthwhile things. But I believe what Paul is clearly saying is that God gives us the faith we need. Again it is a gift, it is even part of grace from him that he gives us the faith we need to receive the blessings of grace itself.

But I am sure that many of us from time to time, feel a distinct lack of faith. I know I do at times. What can we do in these circumstances. Well, remember the boys father who said to Jesus:

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Mark 9:24 (NIV)

² 'Rock of Ages' by Augustus Montague Toplady.



We can ask God to increase our faith. He as our loving Father will use his Spirit to increase the faith that is already within us in Jesus. We can always cry out to God to help us and assist us. He loves us so much that he is longing to help us in our lives as we walk with him in the journey through life.

But let us not go back to trying to earn his love or attention. We already have his friendship.

So as I thought about what my friend had said about so many Christians, and I know I have been one of those who at times, has gone back to living on the wrong side of the cross. I also thought I wonder what Jesus thinks as he sees Christians trying to earn God's love and friendship when he did all the painful and hard work on the cross so that we might have it as free gift.

I thought it must make him very sad. Humanly speaking I could picture Jesus singing the blues. For he is sometimes, crying over you and he is crying over me, that we are not enjoying the free benefits of grace in a having a close relationship with God. Instead so often we are trying so hard to bring this about.

So out of this conversation with my friend I wrote this song that I call, 'Jesus Blues'. I would like to sing this to you. The words will be on the screen.³ *(See below & on web site).*

Jesus Blues

Why do we live as if Jesus hadn't died?
Why do we live that way?
We seem to forget all that he did,
We just seem to throw it away.

For Jesus is crying; Jesus is sighing.
Jesus is singing the blues.
He's crying over you & he's crying over me.
Jesus is singing the blues.

Why do we talk about the grace of God
But fail to make it so.
We love all the words that say it is free
But fail to allow it to grow.

For Jesus is crying ...

Why do we try to earn his love?
When it's through his grace we receive.
All we have to do is open our hearts
And then in Jesus believe.

For Jesus is crying ...

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³ 2417 words



Old Testament

Old covenant

Old agreement

New Testament

New covenant

New agreement

Law

Rules sacrifice

“Doing things”

GRACE

No Rules

“Resting in Jesus”

BC



AD

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