

# **THE MYSTERY OF GOD**

## **Part 9a**

Last week I spoke to you about the cross of Christ, about the great atonement that took place on that cross. I want to continue talking about that sacrifice this morning but we first need to do some thinking about the world.

We need to think about the world because the world is the reason for the cross in the first place. I know we like to think that Christ went to the cross for our sins; that He did that out of love for us—and that is all true, but it is critical that you understand, that is only a part of the picture. There is so much more to see and learn, and the Lord willing we will do that as we continue our study of *the mystery of God!*

Turn with me, if you will to **Genesis 1**, and let's look at a couple of scriptures together. Look at **verse 1**: "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" The rest of that chapter speaks about God's creative activity in bringing about the physical, material universe and everything in it. Now drop down to **verse 31**, and read what Moses, wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*" Read that again, and let every word register on your mind: *And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.*"

Now flip your Bible to **1 John 5** and let's read **verse 19** together. John writes: "*We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*" What did John say? He said that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one! We need to ask ourselves, "*How did that happen?*" "*What happened!*" In Genesis 1:31, God looks and sees everything He has made, and declares that it is very good. But by the time we get to 1 John 5, this whole world—the Greek word there is *kosmos* so we are talking about something that has cosmic implications—it lies in the power of the evil one. We have got to ask (it is absolutely critical that we understand!) *how did that happen? What went wrong?*

Well, we know what went wrong, don't we? Even if we don't know WHAT went wrong, at least we know something is terribly wrong! **Romans 5:12** tells us that sin came into the world and Paul is referring to what is described in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Genesis. When our first mother and father took that fatal step, in the language of Romans 8, the whole creation became subjected to futility; it became subject to a bondage of corruption. We see that, don't we? Death and decay is inherent, not just with people, but with every living thing, and not just with living things, but with the universe itself. We live in a universe that is dying, for pity's sake! Don't take my word for it; ask any physicist or scientist, they'll confirm that's true!

Paul said sin came into the world, and Romans 5:12 says that death came about because of sin, and has spread to all men, because all have sinned. Notice that expression, "*death spread to all men.*" You get the feeling that sin and death are like a *spiritual Ebola virus* that spreads and continues spreading until the whole world today is sick and dying! And that is precisely what

happened! And it is still happening today. Sin has so infected the human race that its effect and influence is everywhere and at all times. We might say that is in the world's DNA. It is in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat! I'm not saying that you can go stick a thermometer in the earth somewhere or take some soil samples and diagnose what's ailing the world. It isn't anything physical, although the physical, material world suffers because of it. Sin has affected everything associated with mankind. Is there any doubt that it is in our governments? Do you think it isn't in our schools and universities. It's even in our day cares and Head Start, for heaven's sake! It is our marriages and homes. It is our work and in our play. It is in the literature we read and the music we make and listen to; the pictures we take and paint and look at. It is in our intellect, technology and media. It's in all of our churches; it's even here in this assembly, many of us carried it in with us this morning. It's in your heart and mine. I daresay you would be hard pressed to find one thing that has not been corrupted to some degree or another by sin. Even the Scriptures have been hi-jacked by sin to become something God never intended for them to be.

Everywhere we look, everywhere we live, we see the catastrophic, cosmic effects of sin. From every practical vantage point, it would appear that the forces described in **Ephesians 6** are in control and winning. In **verse 12**, Paul says, "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" That helps us understand how John could say, "*the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*" Maybe that also helps us put into context a little more what we read in **John 3:16**: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but shall have everlasting life.*"

Think about it brethren! God so loved the world? How are we supposed to get our minds and hearts wrapped around that? He loves the world that hates Him? He loves the world that loves evil? He loves the world that ignores Him? Disobeys Him? Dishonors Him? How can He do that? Is this the God who tells the rest of us to love our enemies? Yes, that's the one, so maybe He is just asking us to do what He does!

That's why it is so important that we understand what happened on the cross. I'm not minimizing what Jesus did for each one of us in terms of our personal need for forgiveness and life instead of God's wrath and destruction, but if we focus only on that, we are going to miss one of the most significant teachings of the Bible! Christ came to die on the cross so He could also defeat sin and death, and the powers behind both of those. He came to do that because as long as they remained unchallenged and undefeated, there was no way God's eternal plan could reach its intended goal. And while it looked like there was no way to challenge the forces behind sin and death, God did have a way, and it was the most amazing thing you have ever seen, and maybe you have yet to even see it!

I love preaching the good news!

But first, let's take a closer look at the forces that are so hostile to faith and hope and love, and truth. In **John 15:19** Jesus said the world hates you. In **16:33** he said, "*In the world you will*

*have tribulation.*” I know I don’t have to tell you that the world lies in the power of the evil one. For heaven’s sake, they are beheading people on live television! In Australia this week the authorities arrested fifteen young men who were going to go on a Jihadist killing spree. Their goal was to randomly pick and behead fifteen people on the street. What kind of sick world are we living in? What kind of world is it that sticks needles full of a saline solution into an embryonic sac, in order to take the life of the child that is forming there, and call it birth control? What kind of world is it where young girls and even young boys are being kidnapped and sold on the international market as sex-slaves? What kind of world is it that wants to settle every difference with war?

But of course the world didn’t start out that way. God didn’t create these evil forces, but somewhere along the way, somehow that which was formed by the mind and heart of God became derailed and began to oppose God and His eternal purpose. Then those forces began to seduce those creatures that were made in the image of God. We are a part of that of course, and we need to understand, “the devil didn’t make me do it,” the devil talked me into it. He conned me, deceived me, lied to me and made choosing evil look like the greatest best thing we could ever do. At some point, we could have said no, but we said yes. At some point we could have said yes, but we said no, and we not only sinned ourselves, we became sinners. We became a part of the problem. It occurred to me the other day that we are not people who have a problem that needs to be solved. We are the problem! We don’t need solving, we need saving! I’ve seen a sign somewhere that says, “If you are not a part of the solution, you are a part of the problem.” Well, that’s what we are, isn’t it?

But understand, you didn’t start out this way either. When you were born, and for some time after that momentous event, you were sinless and innocent and pure. But it wasn’t long, growing up in a world completely infected with the virus of evil that you too began to have evil thoughts, have evil attitudes, say evil things, do things that were wrong. Maybe you even realized at the moment that they were wrong but you did them anyway. So, yes, we need saving, and I’m thankful Christ’s coming made that possible, but do you understand, He didn’t just come to take your place on the cross. He came to take evil and the world on and defeat them.

And here’s the amazing, good news—HE DID THAT AS ONE OF US! His coming was not intended to be a sort of divine duel with the devil. He did do that—didn’t He!, and He won, didn’t He? But that Christ didn’t defeat evil, He didn’t stand up to a world gone mad and flex some divine muscles. He could have done that, for sure! He could have done that with His mind, as when he transformed water into wine—good wine! He could have done that with his mind as easily as when He calmed a storm at sea, when He healed the sick, gave the blind their sight back, and when He raised the dead. He could have done that, but that isn’t what he did.

He overcame evil in the only way it can ever be overcome. He lived a life of perfect obedience. He lived by every word that proceeded from the mouth of God. He lived a morally pure life. You can get a good index to how he lived by looking at the beatitudes in Matthew 5. Those were not just platitudes for Jesus, they were foundation principles upon which he lived every

moment, that formed every thought and attitude, every word and everything he did. He did that, all the way right up to his dying breath on the cross, not just so you and I could have our sins atoned for, but so that the forces that are responsible for all of the sin and death in this world could be defeated. And He did that as one of us! He did that, and He went to the cross in order to triumph over sin and death.

He's the one who fought and won! He's the one who gained the victory. It wasn't us, and it never will be us. It wasn't us at our very best. It wasn't us going to worship. It wasn't us getting baptized. It wasn't us reading the Bible, saying our prayers. It wasn't us doing all kinds of good works. It was Him and Him alone. That's why our message must always be the good news of Christ and Him crucified!

Listen to Paul as he recapitulates what really happened—what maybe we really haven't seen or understood very well. In **Philippians 2**, beginning in **verse 5**, Paul says:

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7) but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8) And being found in human form, **he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

*9) Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10) so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

I love that Paul said, "*He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" Then he goes on to say, "*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" Isn't that what Jesus said happened to Him? In **Matthew 28:18**, didn't Jesus say, "*All authority has been given to me, in heaven and on earth,*"?

So, how did Christ accomplish His mission, which wasn't just to die on the cross for your sins and mine, but to defeat evil, to triumph over all powers, all forces? How did He do that? Paul said He did that by dying on the cross.

We say that, and we know that, but I'm not really sure we get it! Think about Paul going all over the Roman world and proclaiming Jesus is Lord. Oh, is that right, well we have a couple of hundred thousand Roman legionnaires who will take issue with you about that. Jesus is not Lord. Caesar is Lord. We have this problem today, don't we? It's hard for us, even today, to say, and really mean it that "Jesus is Lord." We can say that in here, but in here is not where it really needs to be said. We need to be saying out there where we live day after day, where we

work and play. We need to be saying that in the context of our marriages and our families. We need to be saying that when we are tempted to put pleasure before God, when we are tempted to avenge ourselves, when we are discouraged and feel defeated, we need to remind ourselves, Jesus is Lord!

When the Romans said Caesar is Lord, at least they had some proof. They had the power of the sword. You either bowed your knee and confessed Caesar is Lord, or you were brutally killed. In 64 BC, the Emperor of Rome had 6000 followers of Spartacus crucified lining the main road leading into Rome for miles. Death by crucifixion was the form of death Rome used almost exclusively for anyone who challenged Rome's authority or refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord.

When Christ was put to death on the cross, at the order of the Roman governor by the way, it was Rome's way of dismissing Jesus' claims to be Lord. But Paul says, it was Christ dying on the cross that put all of the powers and rulers and authorities and forces of evil that are in this world in their place. Caesar is not Lord! Christ is Lord. We need to hear this! And we need to be telling this to everyone we meet. But what proof do we have that Jesus is Lord. Paul said, death on the cross proved that Jesus is Lord. Rome put him on a cross to prove that He wasn't Lord, but Paul said, God put him on a cross to prove that He is Lord. Because of that sacrifice, God gave Him all authority.

Listen, I'm not done, okay? I'm not done, but my time is up, and I know some of you would love it if I would just continue, but it isn't fair to tell people our services start and end at a certain time, and then not keep our word. So I am going to quit, but I hope you will come back tonight so we can finish this together. You really need to hear the rest of this message on the cross, and I'm afraid, if you miss it, you are going to miss the most important part. So join us again this evening at 5 p.m., will you?

Right now I just want to ask you, "Is Jesus your Lord?" Before you answer that, let me ask you, are you living a faithful, obedient life? Lot of people say that Jesus is their Lord, but then they continue to live how they want to live, do what they want to do. Jesus is not their Lord, He is their plaything! He is their hobby. He is only your Lord if you obey Him. Read Luke 6:46 and see if I'm telling you the truth.

If you are not a Christian, what's the problem? Do you not believe? Are you unwilling to obey the Lord? Are you waiting for a better time? And if so, in the meantime, if for some reason, death comes to claim your soul, what will you say? If you are not a Christian, we hope and pray you will not put it off one more day. Let today be the day when you truly make Christ your Lord!

If you have done that in the past, but have not been faithful about following Him, I want you to know, God doesn't hate you; He isn't mad at you. But He is waiting for you to really start taking your faith and confession seriously. It is not enough to just be a Christian in name only. If you

need to respond this morning, for any reason, will you come and let your desire be made known.