

Why did Jesus come?

(The Gospel vs our gospel / Show us the Father)

1 May 2014

Reading John 1:1-18

I think it appropriate to revisit the theme of God's Fatherhood again. In this short series of studies we will consider the following.

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We sentimentalise over the coming of a baby during Christmas, but we need to consider the real question of why Jesus came. We have the simple answer that Jesus came to save the world. Luke said,

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10)

That is the answer that is often given. Yes, that is true, very true, and a very important answer too. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. But we need to go further than that. The reason is this. If we do not see the reason behind Jesus coming to seek and to save the lost, then we will impose our reason on the question and distort the real reason of Christ's coming. We have just done that. This true saying of Jesus has been subjected to a very human interpretation. We understand that in terms of our expectation and not of God.

Let me explain what I mean by all that. It is true that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. The twist is this. The human interpretation puts the lost person at the centre of God's action. In a sense that again is true as we see that human life is the pinnacle of the creation. It is also true that humanity had sinned. So we understand that God has to deal with sin and He sent His Son to bear all our guilt. Sin then became the issue that governs God's action. He had to do something to redeem His creation, a kind of plan B when God was caught by the unexpected, so we think. As a result, God sent His Son to come and to die in our place. And now we are restored to get on with our lives and with whatever we are doing. We see that there is some truth here but part of it is made up by man and a distortion of the truth. Where is the distortion in what I have just put to you? I will mention just four. These are four areas where we have not fully appreciated as we try to understand the gospel.

1. God has no plan B and sin is not the central focus.
2. There is no appreciation of the oneness with Jesus' humanity.
3. The gospel presented has to be Trinitarian and not solely Christological.
4. Our teaching tends towards the ethical (and therefore legalistic).

Firstly, there is no plan B with God. God did not send His Son because there is a fault in the system, like a kind of a patch to upgrade the program. The coming of the Son was planned before the creation of the world. Paul wrote,

¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you. (1 Peter 1:19-20)

Christ's coming was to make manifest the plan of God. It was more for the sake of God than for our sake. The sacrifice of Christ was not a plan B. It was the plan of God ever since the beginning of time for humanity to be taken into the communion of the Father and Son. It was the plan of the Father for the Son to accomplish this. It was not an afterthought because of sin. Revelation gives to us a glimpse of what was before the creation.

⁸ and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered. (Rev. 13:8)

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8, Torrance)

The Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world, i.e. before the creation. Don't ask me to explain that. What it is saying is that it is in God's plan for the Son to become a human person to fulfil His purpose for His creation. If that is the case then our salvation must also be planned likewise as Paul affirmed.

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (Eph. 1:4-5)

The Son's coming was planned before the foundation of the world. Was there just a plan for the Son's coming and the salvation left to the decision of humanity as if we hold the trump card? No, 'he chose us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world'. So we can see that the humanistic interpretation leaves us holding all the cards and God remains at the periphery? How dreadful? This is a barrier to our appreciation of the grace of God. We have sung the song, 'Before He planned the world He made, He planned the family'. This is God's grace. God's grace is total and given before there was any hint of a human decision.

At the outset we need to put aside the idea of causality. What is meant by this? While we acknowledge the sin of humanity, we think that God then put a rescue package together and sent His Son to do the job. Sin is not a problem that God had to solve.

Secondly, the distortion kept God and man apart. Humankind continues with its life while God functions as an external saviour, leaving humanity to make all the decisions. As a result it is often asked, where is God in all that happen in our lives, especially the not so favourable ones? It is asked because of faulty theology, a theology that does not take the humanity of Jesus seriously. God is with us. His name is Emmanuel and it is not just a name but a reality in our lives. We have said much about the humanity of Jesus. He came to take on our humanity so that He can redeem us from within our sinful humanity and give us His life and purity.

A third problem is that the salvation is taught purely from a Christological point of view, i.e. it is all the work of Christ and the other persons of the Godhead, Father and Spirit did not merit much consideration. I will talk about more about that later in the series.

A fourth problem in our understanding is that we turn the whole of the life of Christ given to us in the gospels as ethics and this is particularly so in the Sunday Schools where children are taught to be good just like what is sung in this carol, the third verse in 'Once in royal David city'.

And through all His wondrous childhood
He would honour and obey,
love and watch the gentle mother
in whose tender arms He lay:
Christian children all should be

kind, obedient, good as He.

With this understanding, then it becomes natural to fall into a legalistic and contractual framework.

Why did Jesus come?

When we see salvation in isolation from the Godhead (the Trinitarian God), those are the sort of problems we will have. We will insert our own interpretation and design our own system of salvation in the name of God.

While it is true that the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost, we must not leave out the primary mission of the coming of the Son of Man. He came to reveal the Father. Leave that out and the whole of the salvation story will be distorted. This is what John wrote when he introduced the theme of the coming of Christ, 'the word became flesh'.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ... ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:1-18)

Why did the Word become flesh? It is to make known the Father. John did not start his gospel with sin or the need of humanity for redemption. None of the gospel writers did. The salvation story does not start with the need of humanity. It has to start with the loving heart of the Father and the coming of the Son – the climax of history. Why is this so?

Up to the time of Jesus' coming, God was only known in an abstract way. He has spoken through the prophets. The Israelites have only known God through symbols and rituals, like the sacrificial system, the temple and the symbolism of the high priest. These point to the coming of the Son of God. Now that the Son has come, the symbolism became unnecessary. They have served their purposes. Jesus now shows to us the reality of the Godhead. He has come in the flesh to show to us the oneness of God and humanity. He is the God made man. This is the point that is missed. The early church fought long and hard to establish this dogma of both the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Much blood was shed in the process. Why? Because this is essential to our faith. The church today, while affirming the divinity of Jesus, has not celebrated His humanity except for a brief period over Christmas and that was over a sentimental baby. The humanity of Jesus has not figured much in our theology. John continues to make the point in his letters. He wrote,

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — ² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — ³ we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1-4)

The coming of the Son is to restore the relational, not to establish a new system of dogma. The reality of Jesus incarnation is the restoration of fellowship (union) with the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ'. In other words Jesus takes us back to the communion that He has with the Father. This is the will of the Father before the creation of the world. When we say we are incorporated with Christ at baptism, we are saying that we have been restored to the communion of the Father and Son.

We are as ignorant as Phillip when he asked the Lord to show him the Father.

⁸ Phillip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Phillip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in

me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. (John 14:8-11)

'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father'. This is the gross defect in Christianity. We want the baby in the manger. We may even romanticize over the cross, but not see the Father. Why is it so important to see the Father?

To see the Father is to see the very fundamental basis of all relationships. The creation is relational. The dealing with Israel and the whole of creation is relational. Christ's coming is not merely to do a job, but to re-establish the relational. Yet, the relational is so lacking in our churches because we have turned our churches into organizations. The pastor has become the CEO and not an under-shepherd. The ministry is no longer relational, but a job with working conditions and job descriptions. Salvation is not taught in terms of the relational, but has become the recitation of a prayer and adherence to a dogma. Baptism is not understood as being incorporated into the relationship with God, but has become the expression of the decision I have made. The Lord's Supper is no longer the expression of the oneness with God, but has become a ritual and sometimes with magical healing powers. All these have arisen because we have not started with the communion of the Father and the Son, into which we have been restored. We have not known the Father.

We need to come away from the watered down version of salvation, of why Jesus come. He is the Son of God (not to be understood biologically), and our incorporation into Him makes us sons and daughters of the living God, i.e. sons and daughters of the Father. What is sad in the churches today is that not many are sons and daughters because they do not know the Father.

Let us see again the logic of John's Prologue.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ... ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to (in the bosom of) the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:10-18 NRSV)

Jesus came with to give us the power to become children of God. This is the new birth. What we have today is the ridiculous situation where we have so-called born again children of God who do not know the Father! May we know the love of the Father and the grace of the Son who came to make the Father known.

We need to know the Father, not merely having some information about Him, but knowing Him in a living interaction through His Son and Spirit. If that does not happen then we will create our own image of the Father and that is faulty as has happened so often. One common reconstruction of the fatherhood of God is the image from our earthly fatherhood. All earthly fatherhood is faulty because there isn't one perfect father on earth. We need to work out our own fatherhood from the heavenly Father. So Paul says,

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and earth takes its name. (Eph 3:14-15)

Let me give you an illustration to make the point. We have a ministry at Murray Bridge. When we go there on Sunday afternoon, one of our members, a doctor, conducts a clinic there. We have come to know the folks there and we relate with them well. However, there are some who will come because there is doctor there who heals and dispenses medication without knowing who he is. That is a very defective knowledge of him. They only come to

see us for sick certificates and medicines. Some don't even stay around for the service to hear the Word preached. They really do not know us and to provide that kind of service is not satisfying for us. Many Christians are like that. They only see God as one who dispenses goodies to them. They do not know the Father.

On behalf of the rest of the disciples, Phillip's request for Jesus to show them the Father reflects the deepest need in all of us, yet we are so ignorant of our need. We think we know the Father but what we know is simply a set of notions, so-called church doctrines. We think we have an image of the Father but what we have is merely an image of our earthly fathers with all its imperfections. We think we have a relationship with the heavenly Father but what we have is merely a relationship with an ideal in our mind very much like that of a Santa.

I am thankful for being led to the New Creation Teaching Ministry here where the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God was taught to me during the years when I was learning to be a father to two little girls. I would not have exchanged that for any thing because God has led me that way and that is the most precious thing that He has given to me – the knowledge of Him as Father. I was glad that I could not get a job in Sydney during those days and declined a better paid job in Canberra to get to Adelaide. For what one might asked? With hindsight looking back almost forty years, I might say that the leading of God was not so much for the training job in surgery but rather that I might come to know Him, the Father.

The problem in our society today is the deficiency in knowing what true fatherhood is. Boys and girls, especially for boys today, do not know what true fatherhood is. Some do not have fathers and others have two or more. I do not claim to have been a perfect father, but I know the heavenly Father and am able to point the way to Him. Despite not having a father for most of my teenage years, by the grace of God, I did not miss much because as a young man I have come to know the heavenly Father. No one taught me the how-to of being a good father, but knowing the Father, He has guided me to work out many of the practicalities of being father.

Why did Jesus come? It is to make known to us the Father and this is where we miss the point. The Father gives to us the Son and the Spirit. While we receive the Son and Spirit we have just about completely forgotten the Giver, the Father. We are like little children who have been given gifts and become so enthralled with the gifts that we ignore the person who gives them to us. The Chinese fare a little better here for a change. The Chinese custom is not to open the gift until the giver has gone so that the time can be spent with the giver. Of course the real reason behind that custom is not to embarrass the giver should the gift be not too impressive. That is not so with God's gift to us. He gave to us His dear Son, but we are not to understand that in a biological sense, just as we cannot try to understand the Fatherhood of God in an earthly sense.

When we fail to see God as Father we will fail to see the splendour of His greatness and will only frolic with our imperfect ideal in the sandpit of our own creation, sentimentalising over a babe in the manger or romanticising the old rugged cross. The babe and the cross are part of the picture but if we only see that then we miss the whole picture.

When we are taken by the Spirit into Christ, the Son of God, we have become the children of God and if children, then God is Father, a relationship that we have entered into, and not a doctrine that we subscribed to.

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:14-17)