



BEHOLD YOUR GOD - WEEK 5
Beholding God in the Gospel

**13. THE ROBBING OF GOD (MAL.
3:8–9)**

Throughout the Old Testament, an offering was something you gave, but the tithe was something you owed. It belonged to the Lord and it was repaid—it wasn't a gift. On top of the importance of recognizing God's sovereignty in the tithe, the whole priestly system relied on the tithe to stay functional. Of particular interest here is the how the withholding of some in Israel put the whole nation at risk of God's judgment.

Pray for Rick & Robbin Bouslog & Wanda Acton

Opening prayer

Prayer for the persecuted church:

Here

Prayer for a local church:

This morning we pray for our brothers Ryan Sharp and Jeff Johnson at Impact Church.

Closing prayer

INTRO: The Gospel

HERE'S WHAT THE PROBLEM IS: OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL IS NOT DEEP ENOUGH

When you think of the gospel, do you think of certain parts of the Bible? Or certain Bible stories? Or do you think of the entire Bible from beginning to end as one long mountain range of truth about Jesus Christ? Because that's what we mean here at Center Church when we refer to the gospel — the entire Bible presents the gospel. Not just the New Testament, not just Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but all 66 books of the Bible tell the

gospel. The gospel story of Jesus is at the center of Scripture. (That's why we're called Center Church.) Today, we're going to behold God in His work of salvation — the gospel.

God's work in salvation is the greatest display of His character. His actions are always in line with His character. So, if God is holy, the salvation He provides for you will make you holy. If God is kind, the gospel He saves you with will make you kind. If God is giving, the gospel He saves you with will make you giving, etc.

Now, one false objection to Christianity that is sometimes given is, “I know some Christians and they’re nothing like that.” None of us deny that there are all kinds of people who call themselves Christians who do not live like Christians. But here’s why it’s a false objection. God Himself says that on the day of judgment there will be all kinds people who will claim to be Christians, but Jesus will say to them, “I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of iniquity.”

If the Bible taught that a person could know Christ without having their character changed then we'd have an objection with some weight. But the Bible doesn't teach that.

So, here's the thing about this objection. This objection can only be made using the Christian worldview, because what does it matter if a Christian doesn't act like a Christian if Christianity is untrue? It's been said that the worst thing you can say about a Christian is that they are not Christian

enough. But you have to borrow the Christian worldview to make that objection.

The point is, God's actions always reflect His character and the gospel is the greatest display of His character that He has given to the world. What God does must reflect who He is.

Unfortunately, when our view of God is shallow, our descriptions of the gospel are often the same. What words would you use to describe the gospel? Salvation. Being saved?

Born again? Those are all good biblical ways of describing salvation, but God uses a multiplicity of words to describe the greatness of the work He has done through Christ in the gospel.

What does the fact that we often only have one or two words to describe salvation say about us? The gospel is smaller than it should be in our eyes, because God is smaller than He should be in our eyes.

George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the First Great Awakening, said that the most difficult thing to be saved from is not our badness, but our goodness. Presenting the gospel to people who know they're sinners is not the difficulty. The difficulty is presenting the gospel to upstanding citizens.

Listen to what Whitefield said: "Before you can speak peace to your heart, you must be brought to see that God may justly damn you for the best prayer you ever offered in all your life. You must be brought to see all your

duties, all your righteousness, are so far from recommending you to God that you will see them as filthy rags... Works? Works? Can a man get to heaven by works? I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand.”

Describing his own personal journey to believe in Christ, Whitefield said: “God showed me that I must be born again or be damned.” Then he prayed, “Lord, if I am not a Christian, or if I am not a real one, for Jesus

Christ's sake, show me what Christianity is, that I may not be damned at last."

Now there's a sinner's prayer worth repeating. That's the sinner's prayer that should be circulating throughout the churches in America today: "Lord, if I am not a Christian, or if I am not a real one, for Jesus Christ's sake, show me what Christianity is!"

BIG IDEA: Rethinking God causes us to rethink the gospel. And rethinking the gospel causes a light to shine back on God so that

we might see the magnitude and glory of Who He is.

Today we're going to look at seven biblical words that are used to describe something true about the gospel. And we're going to look at them in light of two attributes of God — His power and His wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1:23-24

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to

**those who are called, both Jews and Greeks,
Christ the power of God and the wisdom of
God.**

The Bible teaches us that in the gospel God shows humanity both His power and His wisdom, though it doesn't appear that way to everyone.

To some Jews it was a stumbling block. "How could God become a man?" To some Jews it was the power and wisdom of God.

To some Gentiles it was ludicrous. “Why would God kill someone on my behalf?” To other Gentiles the gospel was the power and wisdom of God.

Let’s see where you land today? Is the gospel a stumbling block to you? Is it foolishness? Or is it the power and wisdom of God?

Psalm 147:5 (NASB)

**⁵ Great is our Lord and abundant in strength;
His understanding is infinite.**

“The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases. He cannot be limited in regard to action.” — Stephen Charnock

“He who cannot do what he will and perform all his pleasure cannot be God.” — Arthur Pink

Why is that? Because God is all-powerful. If there was something He could not do, He would not be all-powerful.

And his wisdom is infinite. It's limitless. There is not a "what if" scenario that God doesn't already know the answer to, which means this world is where it is right now because God has allowed it for His own purposes.

Now, if that doesn't sit well with you, let me share something Timothy Keller either wrote or said and that is that we, of the 21st century, feel that if we can't understand something then there can't be good explanation or reason for it.

Ancient people experienced way more suffering and death than we do, but they did not question the goodness of God the way we do today, because they believed there were reasons that they did not yet understand. So, let me be frank, let's chalk our view up to simple arrogance.

So, let's look at some terms the Bible uses to describe the power and wisdom of God as seen in the gospel.

BIG IDEA: Rethinking God causes us to rethink the gospel. The gospel is deeper and wider than our view of it.

“I am not foolish enough to suggest that I can understand the meaning of the death of my Lord upon the cross exhaustively. I cannot. But I can say that an explanation is given in the Scriptures themselves which I must uphold; and I must test any view that anybody may put forward with regard to the death of our Lord by what the Scriptures show me I am

to know. As we have seen, it is our business, always, to go as far as revelation leads us. It is our duty never to try to go beyond that.”

— MLJ

1. Atonement

TO SET AT ONE

To atone means to set at one; it really means at-one-ment; it means that two people who were formerly divided are brought together and made as one. Two parties that have been

separated by relational breakdown are brought together.

The relational breakdown between humanity and God is because of our sin. To sin means to break the law. We have broken God's laws. We often regard the law of God as nothing but mere human opinion, and outdated opinions at that. So, you can see the breakdown is severe.

- Atonement really refers to everything that Christ has accomplished in the gospel, in His life, death and resurrection to bring us back to God, to connect us with God again.
- It began with the OT sacrifices, which were only shadows of the clear picture of atonement we see in Christ.

Matthew 5:17

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Christ not only fulfilled the moral law of God, living a sinless life, He fulfilled the ritual aspect of God’s law in the sacrifices.

Luke 24:44

44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with

you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

Jesus saw His life as a fulfillment of the OT sacrifices. Another little tidbit that doesn't allow the view that He was only a good teacher.

The NT view of atonement emphasizes two things: substitution and penalty. That Christ died in our place as our substitute and that He

took the penalty for our sins that we deserve. We see both of these things foreshadowed in the OT sacrifices.

This is where our view our sinfulness has to go deeper. You're not just imperfect, my friend. Your corruption has contributed to the worldwide problem of evil and corruption in the world.

What if I were to say to you, "You have personally made the world a worse place."

Now, many of us would buy into that statement, because we see our sins as little things, “trifles” as J.I. Packer called them.

If you consider your sins small little insignificant things, it just shows you how small your view of God is. Think about that. To say to the all-wise, all-powerful God of the universe, “I don’t think you’re so hot. And if you want to condemn me because I don’t think you’re so hot, then you’re just a petty little God.” That’s like the ant calling a giant

stupid. It just shows that the ant doesn't know who he's speaking to.

MLJ said that the way to see our sin is not primarily by self-examination but by beholding God.

Christ shed His blood to bring you back to God, because God's holiness insisted upon it, demanded an atonement for sin.

1 Corinthians 15:3

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

Mark 10:45

45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (atonement) for many.”

Christ's death was in your place so that you would not pay for the corruption you've contributed to the worldwide problem of evil.

This is why Jewish Christians stopped participating in the animal sacrifices, and began participating in a new ritual called The Lord's Supper where we remember His blood that was shed to cover over our sins as taught in the book of the law, Leviticus.

Leviticus 10:17

17 “Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary, since it is a thing most holy and has been given to you that you may bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord?

So, atonement basically refers to everything we’re going to be talking about today.

Second, the cross of Christ was there to satisfy God’s wrath — propitiation.

2. Propitiation

TO SATISFY; CHRIST SATISFIED GOD'S WRATH

1 John 2:2

² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Many people in our culture struggle with the idea of God judging people and especially of God punishing people eternally in hell by

pouring His wrath out upon them. There are several cultural reasons for this, one of them being our cultural value of accepting everyone for who they are without judgment.

Now, as I've argued before, this cultural value actually finds its roots in the Christian gospel, but as a secular value it has lost its context. So, instead of understanding the biblical Jesus who dined with sinners and drew them in because of His personhood, which is where we get the cultural value of accepting people for who they are — without this context of

Christ, our culture fails to see these people did not remain the same *after* dining with Jesus. They left their lives of sin and began following Jesus.

But do you notice the double-edge hypocrisy of this cultural value? On one hand some people say, “I know Christians who don’t act like Christians,” and on the other hand, “You should just accept people for who they are.” What happened to the first hand? Should we complain about them or accept them for who they are?

Another cultural value that actually supports God's wrath is the value of justice. Who doesn't want to see a rapist punished to the full extent of the law? This cry for justice has to do with how we value and respect someone's personhood, again derived from the Christian teaching that we each have special dignity because we are created in God's image. The Me-Too movement has this cry for justice to it.

But if we only remain person-centered in our view, (man-centered, woman-centered, self-centered) we won't see that biblical justice has to do with respecting God's Personhood.

God is the Creator. He's Definer of reality. When God's Personhood is violated by the actions of arrogant little humans, shouldn't God demand justice? Being that He is justice and therefore defines justice and you personally have violated His Personhood.

If you want a God without wrath, then you want a God who tolerates the most unspeakable evil in the world. Are you holier than God in your cry for justice? Arrogant human, please!

The wisdom of propitiation is that God poured out His wrath for your sins on Christ instead of pouring out His wrath on you, therefore satisfying His own demands for justice.

This is why Christ suffered more than anyone who ever lived. God's wrath for each person

was multiplied and poured out on Christ in one moment in time.

In this sense, Christ suffered hell for us, because hell is where the unrepentant experience God's wrath for eternity. Jesus took that penalty upon Himself. That's the reason we don't have to fear God's wrath now because of Christ's propitiation. He satisfied God's wrath.

Hebrews 2:17

17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Third, the cross purchased our lives back. The price has been paid to set us free from the domain of darkness.

3. Redemption.

TO PURCHASE, TO PAY THE PRICE

1 Corinthians 6:20

20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Christ paid for our lives. The word ransom has the same idea. It's like we were in prison, held by the domain of darkness, and the ransom that held us there, the payment for bail was paid by Christ.

But here's the thing — the bail was not set by Satan or paid to him. This is often a grave misconception, that God was paying the ransom price to the devil. Not so. In all the Scriptures about redemption and the atonement, God doesn't even mention the devil.

So, what's going on in redemption? A little background.

Psalm 115:16 (ESV)

**16 The heavens are the Lord's heavens,
but the earth he has given to the children
of man.**

God gave us dominion over the earth, but we lost it. When we left God's rule and reign by our disobedience — I refer here to the account of Adam and Eve in the garden when they believed the lies of Satan rather than believing God — we put ourselves under Satan's dominion. And being under Satan's

dominion, he took what God had given us — dominion of this world. That's why the Bible says that Satan is now the god of this world. We surrendered our rightful dominion to him, much the same way that Esau surrendered his birthright to Jacob.

But God doesn't owe the devil anything. The devil is a usurper, he has no rights. He lied and deceived to get what he has.

Our ransom price was set by God. And what's that ransom price? The wages of sin is death. When God expelled us from His presence this is where we were expelled to — the domain of darkness. The price set — death, we could call it blood — was set by God to show the great price of sin. Christ paid the redemption price. So, God set the bail and God paid the bill, so to speak.

Just because the devil played a part in the damnation of humanity doesn't mean he

played a part in the redemption of humanity.
He did not. And he does not.

Colossians 1:13-14

13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

4. Regeneration.

TO BRING LIFE.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

The forgiveness of sins opens the way for regeneration. Regeneration is the life of the Holy Spirit brought to the soul of the believer.

It's the biblical order of salvation. The death comes before the resurrection or life. First, God displayed to the universe the horrific nature of sin. Then He showed the glory of new life. The cross opens the way for regeneration.

The Holy Spirit brings believers spiritual life by taking residence in our souls. This is why Jesus said it was to our advantage that He leave the earth.

John 16:7 (ESV)

7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

The Holy Spirit never leaves us.

During the earthly ministry of Jesus He was only in one place at a time. He was fully human. Yet, He still retained His divinity. He was still God, so He was still omnipresent. God is everywhere at once. Jesus never stopped being God, so He always had this attribute of being omnipresent. It's just that during His earthly ministry He chose not to avail His attribute of omnipresence.

That's what Paul's talking about when he says Jesus emptied Himself. He didn't stop being all-wise, all-powerful and everywhere at once, but He chose not to take advantage of all His attributes while on earth, most of the time. As we saw last week, He could use those attributes when He saw fit, because He had them.

Titus 3:5

5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

5. Faith.

TO TRUST. TO PUT ONE'S FULL WEIGHT UPON.

Three quick facts about faith. First, faith does not come from within you.

Romans 10:17

17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Faith comes from outside of yourself. It comes from the message of the gospel.

Faith, trust in who God is and what He has done comes from hearing about who He is and what He has done — the gospel.

“Well, don’t I have to look inside myself to see if I believe this?” No. Just keep listening to what God says about Who He is and what He has done in Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Two, faith is a gift of God. Faith is the instrument of your salvation. Christ is the object of your salvation. His life, His death and His resurrection are the objects of our faith. Faith is the vehicle that rests upon the object, Christ. And God gives you faith as a gift. But you can't receive that gift unless you're hearing about Who He is and what He has done.

Think of it this way. Faith is a rope ladder. Christ is a helicopter. If you want to be lifted

up by a helicopter from the ground, you don't throw your own rope up to the helicopter. The helicopter lowers a rope ladder down to you. Faith is the gift of God.

Once you're given faith, you have the responsibility to cultivate the faith you're gifted.

That's the third true thing about faith.

2 Timothy 4:7

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Three, the gift of your faith must be cultivated.

6. Repentance.

TO CHANGE YOUR MIND

It can also be defined as turning. You're going one direction but you're presented with the Way and the Truth and the Life and God

changes your mind. Once your mind is changed, you change direction. You turn from self to God.

Matthew 4:17

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

That’s how Jesus began His ministry, by calling people to repent — change your mind.

You have not been thinking the right thoughts about God.

7. Imputation.

TO ASSIGN TO, TO PUT ON, TO ACCOUNT AS

This one verse covers the whole of what we've gone over today very succinctly. This is often called The Great Exchange — our sin for His righteousness. This is one of the most liberating aspects of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:21

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,

So, our sins were imputed to Christ. He put them on Him. God assigned our sins to Christ.

so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Then He imputed Christ's righteousness to us. He put it on us. God assigned the righteous life of Christ to us. Our records have been exchanged. Our sinful record for His perfect record.

We can see an illustration of this truth in the life of the Apostle Paul when he wrote Philemon.

Philemon 18-19

18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.

Now, there are other great truths about the gospel we don't have time to unpack.

9. Justification.

TO DECLARE NOT GUILTY

10. Perseverance.

TO CONTINUE

11. Reconciliation

TO BRING TOGETHER.

And as we go deeper into each other of these truths, the power of God to save us by raising Christ from the dead and the wisdom of this plan should become more precious to us. We should begin to see more clearly and with

deeper conviction that “there is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends.”