

Driven: Things that Enable, Empower and Inspire Believers

The Great Exchange

2 Corinthians 5:21

July 12, 2020 am

HDBC

Only time will tell us how history will assess our current pandemic as compared to other historic contagions. In 1347 a Mongol army was besieging the Genoese trading post in the Crimea. They begin to catapult the bodies of bubonic plague victims over the town's walls. The terrified people in the city fled to Italy, taking with them the deadly bacteria.

Over the next three years the plague spread throughout Europe in a massive epidemic now remembered as ***The Black Death***. An estimated twenty million people perished. That was one third to one half of the population of Europe at the time. Succeeding centuries would see recurring outbreaks of this plague, which remained dangerous until the development of antibiotics in the twentieth century.

Though the ***Black Death*** is the most famous epidemic in history, it is not the only one. The **Spanish flu** epidemic in 1918-19 killed an estimated thirty to fifty million people. It was so deadly that a person could be healthy on Monday, contract the disease on Tuesday and be dead by Thursday or Friday.

Of course, now we are dealing with our own pandemic. Since we are nowhere near the end, only time will tell the full story. Right now we are simply trying to balance safety with practical living.

But there is one plague that is more widespread and deadly than all other epidemics combined. The Puritan writer Ralph Venning called it ***the plague of plagues***. Unlike all other plagues which cause physical death, this one causes physical and spiritual death. It is the plague of sin!

The sin of Adam and Eve plunged all of humanity and all of creation into sin. Unlike the flu, the measles, the mumps and so many other dangerous diseases there is no vaccine for this spiritual plague. However, there is a cure.

2 Corinthians 5:21 outlines the basis for the cure. It involves an exchange of our sins for Christ's righteousness. This is only possible because of another exchange . . . the exchange of his death for ours. Verse 21 explains it in very simple terms. READ text. Note three things.

1. The Parties

There are three parties mentioned in this verse. Each one is important. We can discern the parties involved by looking at the pronouns. It is important to make sure we understand who each pronoun refers to. There are five. Actually four different words used a total of five times.

A. He

This is the first pronoun we come to and it refers to God the Father. I will simply use the word God in this sermon, but be aware that I am referring to God, the Father, rather than God, the Son or Holy Spirit.

How do we know this is a reference to God? The antecedent for this pronoun is found at the end of verse 20. Reconciliation is God's plan. He initiated it out of His love for fallen humanity. The problem with all man-made religions is they assume that a person can reconcile himself or herself to God through his or her own efforts.

The plain teaching of the Bible is that this is impossible. All of us are sinners and incapable of saving ourselves. Our salvation starts with God.

B. Him (used 2 times)

This refers to Jesus, who was the Messiah who left Heaven and came to rescue and redeem us from our own sinfulness. He is the only one capable of purchasing our salvation with His death, for He is the only human who ever lived a sinless life. **I might step into a situation and save your physical life**, but I can do nothing to give you eternal life. Only Jesus can do that.

The perfect sacrifice would have to be a human being, for only a human can die for other humans. Yet he would also have to be God, for only God is sinless. That narrows the field to one man, the God-man, Jesus. And so, He stepped in to be the agent of our salvation.

C. Our & We

These two pronouns refer to us. (Humanity) To people who need to be saved and who have been saved. Some may want to argue over whether or not these pronouns refer to all humanity or only to those who are ultimately saved. I think that is a pointless and futile debate.

The point is, all people are the ones in need of being saved. We are the ones infected with the terminal disease of sin which would cause us to be lost for all eternity, without a spiritual cure. We (all people) are the ones with the spiritual virus that has no cure, no vaccine, not remedy apart from divine intervention.

2. The Action

So, what was involved in God's plan to rescue us from our sins?

The wording here is important. Notice that it does not say that God made Jesus to be a **sinner**, but to **be sin**. He remained the unblemished son of God. Isaiah 53:4-6 captures the essence and meaning of this phrase.

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.

God took our sins and placed them on Jesus, for Him to bear on our behalf. The one who had no sin was treated as if he were a vile, detestable sinner, for every form wickedness was placed upon Him. The worst things that human beings have done to one another were charged to His account and He bore them as if he had been the actual sinner. He experienced the full fury of God's wrath for my sins, your sins and the sins of others.

There is a great truth here but also a great mystery. How could Jesus become sin for us, while never losing his impeccable nature of innocence both inside and outside? Kent Hughes offers a word picture that may help.

Think of Christ's heart as a sea hemmed in by the mountains of our festering sin. Then imagine our sins coursing down the mountains into his heart until all the mountains of evil slide into the sea.

Or think back to the magnifying glass you played with as a child. If held under the sun's rays, it could start a fire. Remember how if you focused the white spot of its concentrated light on a leaf it would begin to burn? Our sins were focused on Christ on the cross and He suffered the fiery wrath of God.

On the cross Jesus was robed in all that is heinous and hateful as the mass of our corruption poured over him. Wave after wave of our sin was poured over his sinless soul. Again and again during those hours his soul recoiled and convulsed as all our lies, hatreds, jealousies and pride were poured upon his purity.

3. The Purpose

So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

So that points to a purpose clause. The reason for the action. He had imputed our sins onto His son. So, why did God do that to Jesus? So that he might impute the righteousness of His son to us. The plan of salvation can be summed up as a pair of transactions that become effective upon the faith of the individual. Those transactions are . . .

My sins placed on him . . . His righteousness placed on me.

On the cross he took my sins and paid an awful price for me.
Upon my response of faith, His righteousness is applied to me.

So, He has allowed me to trade my sins for His righteousness. That's a great trade. His righteousness is what enables me to be acceptable to God and heaven and eternal life. It is what gives me access to God. Without it, I would never be able to have a relationship with God.

On the cross God treated Jesus as if he had been a vile, wicked sinner.
For eternity God will treat me as if I were as righteous and pure as Jesus.

In salvation you are trading a sure death sentence for the gift of eternal life.

Organ donation is a way of bringing good out of tragedy. The death of a donor can bring life to others.

On August 7, 2016, racing driver Bryan Clauson died following a crash in a Kansas race. But in the midst of his family's heartbreak there was some good news: Clauson had signed up to become an organ donor—a decision that led to five saved lives.

Clauson's family released a statement, thanking fans for prayers and concerns, and then adding,

One of the gifts that Bryan gave us while we sat next to him praying for some good news, was the moment we found out he was an organ donor. It shouldn't have surprised us. All of us have felt Bryan's generosity throughout his life ... It was not lost on our family as we sat huddled around him ... that five families were also sitting in a hospital room somewhere, comforting their loved one and each other while praying for a miracle that Bryan ultimately delivered for them.

In a greater way the death of one man, Jesus, brings life to all who will place their faith in Him.