

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 12-15-13 AM NOTES
"BORN TO SOLVE THE GREAT DILEMMA"
ROMANS 3:24-26
From the Continuing Series, "Connecting Bethlehem and Calvary"

"The important issue of Christmas is not so much that Jesus came, but *why* He came. There was no salvation in His birth. Nor did the sinless way He lived His life have any redemptive force on its own. His example, as flawless as it was, could not rescue men from their sins. Even His teaching, the greatest truth ever revealed to man, could not save us from our sins. There was a price to be paid for our sins. Someone had to die. Only Jesus could do it."
—John MacArthur

I. The Great Dilemma Explained

There is no dilemma with God; the dilemma is from our perspective.

Revelation 13:8b (NIV) "...the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

Romans 3:23 (NKJV) "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 6:23a (NKJV) "For the wages of sin *is* death..."

Ezekiel 18:4b (NKJV) "The soul who sins shall die."

God's mercy is His goodness expressed toward those in misery and distress.

The Great Dilemma—How can God, who is perfect in His justice, display His perfection of mercy toward sinners without violating His justice?

A. The Justice of God

God's Justice or Righteousness—"God always acts in accordance with what is right and He Himself is the final standard of what is right."
—Wayne Grudem

"God's justice is His eternal, immutable commitment always to do what is right."
—R. C. Sproul

1. The Revelation of God's Justice

Romans 3:26a (NIV) "he did it to demonstrate his **justice** at the present time, so as to be **just**..."

Genesis 18:25b (NKJV) "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Psalms 33:4-5a (NKJV) "⁴For the word of the Lord *is* right, and all His work *is done* in truth. ⁵He loves righteousness and justice..."

Psalms 89:14a (NKJV) "Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne..."

Psalms 101:1 (NKJV) "I will sing of mercy and justice; to You, O Lord, I will sing praises."

Isaiah 30:18b (NKJV) "For the Lord *is* a God of justice..."

2. The Result of the Justice of God

God's wrath flows out of His justice.

Romans 1:18a (NKJV) "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..."

Romans 2:5 (ESV) "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

The seriousness of a sin rises with the importance of the one sinned against.

"There is a holy curse hanging over all sin. Not to punish would be unjust. The demeaning of God would be endorsed. A lie would reign at the core of reality. Therefore God says, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them' (Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26)."

—John Piper

B. The Mercy of God

"Mercy is an attribute of God, an infinite and inexhaustible energy within the divine nature which disposes God to be actively compassionate."
—A. W. Tozer

Mercy is “the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures.”
Mercy is “God’s goodness toward those in misery and distress.”

—Arthur Pink
—Wayne Grudem

II. The Dilemma Resolved

Ephesians 2:1 (NKJV) “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins”.

Ephesians 2:12 (NKJV) “...having no hope and without God in the world.”

A. There Must Be a Substitute

1. The Substitute Must Be a Man

Romans 5:12 (NKJV) “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

2. The Substitute Must Be God

John 1:1 (NKJV) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John 1:14 (NKJV) “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

Hebrews 2:14 (NIV) “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.”

Matthew 1:22-23 (NKJV) “²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ *Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,*’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’”

B. There Must Be a Propitiation

Romans 3:24b-25a (NKJV) “²⁴...Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a **propitiation** by His blood...”

Hebrews 2:17 (NKJV) “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make **propitiation** for the sins of the people.”

1 John 2:2 (NKJV) “And He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

1 John 4:10 (NKJV) “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the **propitiation** for our sins.”

Propitiation is the satisfaction of God’s wrath through the providing of a substitute.

2 Corinthians 5:19 (NKJV) “that is, that **God was in Christ** reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

“God Himself placates His own wrath against sin so that His love may go out to embrace and save sinners.”

—James M. Boice

Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV) “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

“The glory of the gospel is this: The one from whom we need to be saved is the one who has saved us.”

—R. C. Sproul

C. There Must Be a Response

Acts 3:19a (NKJV) “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...”

Acts 20:21 (NKJV) “testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 3:26 (NKJV) “to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

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"BORN TO SOLVE THE GREAT DILEMMA"
ROMANS 3:24-26

From the Continuing Series, "Connecting Bethlehem and Calvary"

In 2011 we began a series for a few weeks before Christmas to serve the purpose of enabling us to see the birth of Christ in proper perspective. We continued the same series in 2012 a few weeks before Christmas and we are doing the same thing again this year. Thus far, we have examined six reasons Jesus was born: "Jesus Was Born to Be the Mediator", "Jesus Was Born to Bring Us to God", "Jesus Was Born to Destroy the Devil", "Jesus Was Born to Show God's Love for Sinners", "Jesus Was Born to Give Life to the Dead", and in the last message, "Jesus was Born to Ransom the Many". Today, we will see that "Jesus Was Born to Solve the Great Dilemma".

Christmas was not observed as a special day in the early church. It wasn't until the fifth century that Christmas was given any kind of official recognition. The early church celebrated the resurrection of Christ, but not His birth. The reason we gather together to worship on the first day of the week is because it is a weekly celebration of His resurrection. I am not suggesting that we abandon celebrating Christ's birth. I think that it is good and pleasing to God to celebrate the incarnation of His Son. However, we should be intentional to connect the events of His birth to the accomplishments of His cross and resurrection. Let me share a quote that I have shared before, but it summarizes the burden of my heart: "The important issue of Christmas is not so much that Jesus came, but *why* He came. There was no salvation in His birth. Nor did the sinless way He lived His life have any redemptive force on its own. His example, as flawless as it was, could not rescue men from their sins. Even His teaching, the greatest truth ever revealed to man, could not save us from our sins. There was a price to be paid for our sins. Someone had to die. Only Jesus could do it. [John MacArthur, *The Miracle of Christmas*, Page 116]. An elemental principle of Christianity is that man is a sinner in need of a Savior. Our most basic need is not an example of how to live; it is not moral teaching telling us how to live; we need a Savior! That primary need required a cross and it required shed blood. Let's joyfully celebrate His birth, but be diligent to put it in proper perspective by connecting Bethlehem with Calvary.

With that introduction, let's see the great dilemma that Jesus came to solve.

I. The Great Dilemma Explained

Let me be clear that there is **no dilemma with God**; the dilemma is from our perspective. God has no dilemmas! Man's sin did not catch God by surprise and throw Heaven into a "tizzy" as to what was going to be done next. God knew that man would sin before He ever created man. God did not come up with the whole cross event after sin to deal with the surprising consequences of sin. In God's mind, God the Son was seen as crucified before He even created the world. **Revelation 13:8 (NIV)** speaks of Jesus as "...the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." Someone may ask, "Why would God create man if He knew that man was going to sin and bring devastation into the world?" God created man to display His own glory, and a part of God's glory is His justice, His wrath, His mercy, His love, and grace. Only in seeing His glory and worshipping Him does man find true joy and satisfaction. Apart from a fallen world we would not truly know God's attributes and God's glory and thereby our capacity for eternal joy and satisfaction in God would be severely limited.

Having given that disclaimer, let me lay out for you the great dilemma from man's perspective. God is just. We will look at all the Scriptural evidence for that in a moment. Because He is just, He will not overlook sin (sweep it under the rug). The Bible tells us in **Romans 3:23 (NKJV)** "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". The Bible tells us that because God is perfectly holy and all sin violates His holiness all sin requires death as its penalty. **Romans 6:23a (NKJV)** "For the wages of sin is death..." **Ezekiel 18:4b (NKJV)** "the soul who sins shall die." God's justice demands that since all of mankind is guilty, the death penalty must be carried out on every human being. But wait, the Bible also

tells us very clearly that God is merciful (we'll see the Scriptural evidence of that in a moment). God's mercy is His goodness expressed toward those in misery and distress. God's mercy is manifested toward us in holding back that which we deserve that causes us misery.

From man's vantage point here is the great dilemma: How can God who is perfect in His justice display His perfection of mercy toward sinners without violating His justice? Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem and was placed on a cross on a hill called Calvary to solve this perceived dilemma.

A. The Justice of God

In English, the words justice and righteousness are different words, but in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament there is only one root word for justice and righteousness. The justice or righteousness of God means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and He Himself is the final standard of what is right [Grudem's Systematic Theology, page 203]. R. C. Sproul defines God's justice this way: "God's justice is His eternal, immutable commitment always to do what is right. [R. C. Sproul, *The Truth of the Cross*, Page 19]. We will fail to understand and appreciate the birth of Christ and especially the cross of Christ if we do not understand the justice of God.

1. The Revelation of God's Justice

In the text we read at the beginning of the message in Romans, we see the very plain statement in **Romans 3:26 (NIV)** "he did it to demonstrate his **justice** at the present time, so as to be **just**..." Allow me to give you just a few of the verses in Scripture that proclaim the justice or righteousness of God. **Genesis 18:25b (NKJV)** "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" **Psalms 33:4-5b (NKJV)** "4 For the word of the Lord *is* right, and all His work *is done* in truth. 5 He loves righteousness and justice..." **Psalms 89:14a (NKJV)** "Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne..." In Psalm 101:1 we see mercy and justice together as we do in several other passages. **Psalms 101:1 (NKJV)** "I will sing of mercy and justice; to You, O Lord, I will sing praises." **Isaiah 30:18b (NKJV)** "For the Lord *is* a God of justice..."

2. The Result of the Justice of God

God's wrath flows out of His justice. God's wrath is the holy revulsion of God toward everything that violates His holiness. **Romans 1:18a (NKJV)** "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." In **Romans 2:5 (ESV)** we see the connection between God's wrath and His righteousness or justice, "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." God's wrath is the judicial response to sin. God's righteous wrath will be poured out upon all sin – ALL SIN! Even what seems like a small sin when committed against the great and glorious God is high treason! The seriousness of a sin rises with the importance of the one sinned against. In the line of "importance", God is at the head of the line. Therefore, all sin against God is major; and since all sin is against God, there is no such thing as a "minor sin". Infinite holiness renders every sin worthy of wrath. John Piper said it well: "There is a holy curse hanging over all sin. Not to punish would be unjust. The demeaning of God would be endorsed. A lie would reign at the core of reality. Therefore God says, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them' (Galatians 3:10; Deuteronomy 27:26)." [John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, p 21]. As one who loves and worships God, you don't have to be ashamed of God's wrath. His wrath is as much a part of His perfection as is His love, grace, and mercy.

On one side of this great dilemma is the justice of God – a justice that evokes God's holy wrath against sin.

B. The Mercy of God

What do we mean by "the mercy of God"? Tozer says, "Mercy is an attribute of God, an infinite and inexhaustible energy within the divine nature which disposes God to be actively compassionate" [A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, P96-97]. Arthur Pink defines mercy as, "the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures" [Arthur Pink, *The Attributes of God*, Page 83-84]. The Bible is clear that the one true God is a merciful God. Don't ever fall for the lie that the God of the Old Testament

is a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament is a God of mercy. It is the same God. In the Old Testament, we see God's wrath and His mercy. In the New Testament we see God's mercy and His wrath.

God's mercy is absolutely amazing. Without a proper view of God's justice and wrath, you will never appreciate and stand in awe of His amazing mercy.

II. The Dilemma Resolved

Allow me to state again that the dilemma is on man's side and not on God's side. Here is the dilemma: how can God be just and pour out His righteous wrath on the treasonous sin of mankind and yet be merciful to doomed sinners who were as **Ephesians 2:1b (NKJV)** says, "... dead in trespasses and sins", and as **Ephesians 2:12b (NKJV)** says were a people who had "...no hope and [were] without God in the world"?

A. There Must Be a Substitute

When a person is in the situation described in Ephesians 2:12 of having "no hope", there must be a rescuer to do for them what they cannot do for themselves. To put it another way, our only hope was a divine rescue. The initiative had to be taken by God because we were "dead in trespasses and sin" and a dead person can do nothing to remedy their problem or even assist with their rescue. Let's look at the obvious requirements that one would have to meet to be that substitute, that rescuer or that savior.

1. The Substitute Must Be a Man

Since sin has been committed by man, sin must be atoned for by a man. Only a human being could be an acceptable substitute for human beings. This rescuer could not just be like a human being; He would have to truly **BE a human being**. Suppose I woke up this morning and felt especially noble and told God that I am willing to be that substitute; I am willing to die a horrendous death and satisfy the justice of God by taking on myself the just wrath of God on behalf of all mankind. I meet the requirement of being a human being, but there are two things that disqualify me. First, as a natural born descendent of Adam (the first man), the curse for sin has been passed to me and you and any other candidates for "Savior of the world". **Romans 5:12 (NKJV)** "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned [in Adam]". The second reason that I would not qualify is that I have personally chosen to sin. My death could not be a substitute for others; it would be for my own sin. I do not meet the requirements to be the Savior of the world and neither do you. This substitute would not only have to avoid individual acts of sin; He would have to be born in a miraculous way that would "by-pass" the imputed guilt of Adam's sin to His natural born descendents. The conclusion is that this rescuer, this savior must meet another requirement in addition to being a human being.

2. The Substitute Must Be God

Only one who is God could be totally separated from the taint, the consequences of Adam's sin and conscious acts of sin on their own. The fact is that only God is sinless. The Bible makes it clear that the only one who ever has and ever will qualify to be the Savior, the rescuer is the Lord Jesus Christ! First, He who was from eternity past God the Son took on human flesh and became fully man without ceasing to be God. **John 1:1 (NKJV)** "In the beginning was the Word [obviously referring to Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." A few verses later we read in **John 1:14 (NKJV)** "And the Word [Jesus Christ] became flesh and dwelt among us..." We call that the "incarnation" and that is what we celebrate at Christmas. We see the same truth in **Hebrews 2:14 (NIV)** "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil".

How did Jesus Christ escape the effects of Adam's sin? **Matthew 1:22-23 (NKJV)** "²² So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³ *'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,'* which is translated, 'God with us.'" Because He was virgin born, Jesus Christ escaped the curse of sin that comes from Adam through the father in each generation.

To solve this dilemma, there first must be a substitute and only Jesus Christ meets the qualification to be that substitute!

B. There Must Be a Propitiation

Romans 3:24b-25a (NKJV) ²⁴...Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth *as* a **propitiation** by His blood..." We see that big word "propitiation" uses several other places in Scripture. **Hebrews 2:17 (NKJV)** "Therefore, in all things He [Jesus] had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make **propitiation** for the sins of the people." **1 John 2:2 (NKJV)** "And He Himself [Jesus] is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." **1 John 4:10 (NKJV)** "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the **propitiation** for our sins." The concept of propitiation is at the heart of the Gospel and you need to understand it. This concept of propitiation is proof that God takes sin seriously and that He loves us amazingly. It is by propitiation that the justice and resulting wrath of God is satisfied and mercy of God is extended to sinful man. What is propitiation? The simplest explanation that I could give is that **propitiation is the satisfaction of God's wrath through the providing of a substitute**. Jesus Christ is that substitute and He satisfied the wrath of God by absorbing it when it had been diverted from us to Him. God's just wrath for sin was not withdrawn; it was spent; it was satisfied; it was spent on Jesus Christ.

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

- Phillip P. Bliss (1875)

Redemption procured by a ransom price of Christ Jesus' shed blood spotlights what Jesus' sacrifice did for us. It set us free from the bondage of sin and Satan. Propitiation on the other hand relates to God and the satisfaction of His just wrath. Some more liberal theologians have rejected this concept of propitiation because they say it looks too much like primitive pagan religions where an angry God has to be appeased with some sacrifice. That argument carries no merit. In true Christianity it is never sinners who take the initiative to provide a sacrifice to appease God; it is God Himself who because of His great love provides the way by which His just wrath for sin may be propitiated or satisfied. It is God who provides the means of propitiation – His own Son. That is the opposite of satanic pagan religion. The Bible tells us in **2 Corinthians 5:19 (NKJV)** "that **God was in Christ** reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." James Montgomery Boice said it well: "God Himself placates His own wrath against sin so that His love may go out to embrace and save sinners." [James M. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, page 313]. Christ was not some unwilling participant forced to pour out His life to propitiate our sin. **Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV)** "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." R. C. Sproul summarized it like this: "The glory of the gospel is this: The one from whom we need to be saved is the one who has saved us." [R. C. Sproul, quoted in C. J. Mahaney, *Christ Our Mediator*, page 43].

C. There Must Be a Response

The Bible does not teach universalism – that everybody will eventually be saved. The response of those who will be saved is first repentance. Repentance is a change of mind that when enabled by God's Spirit results in a change of behavior. **Acts 3:19a (NKJV)** "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." When I change my mind about self-righteousness and realize that I am hopeless and deserving of God's wrath and change my mind about sin and see it as cosmic treason against the sovereign Lord of all, then I place faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the propitiation He provided on the cross. **Acts 20:21 (NKJV)** "testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." To place faith in Christ ("believe on the Lord Jesus Christ") is when I trust in, rely upon, commit myself into His hands as my Lord and only hope for salvation. I have nothing to boast in other than God because He has sent His Spirit to open our blinded minds (2 Corinthians 4:4) and

then He grants repentance (2 Timothy 2:25) and even the faith to believe is a gift from Him (Ephesians 2:8).

CONCLUSION

Until we grasp the awfulness of sin and the dread of the wrath of God, we will never deeply respond in rejoicing and praise for the precious gift of propitiation – the satisfaction of God’s wrath by Christ crucified. The great dilemma – How can God who is perfect in His justice display His perfection of mercy toward sinners without violating His justice – is solved by Christ crucified. He was born to satisfy the justice of God that as **Romans 3:26 (NKJV)** says “to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”