

LD 2 ser 5 Sermon Outline

Theme: God's law, and our inability to keep it, reveals to us our sin and misery

Intro: *Rapport/Application:* The problem: our sin (cause) and misery (result)

Point 1: We come to understand our misery because God's law tells us

From experience/Image: you know how this looks/feels

We come to understand our misery because God's law tells us Rom. 3:20; 7:7-25

We may already feel/see it; we have problems, feel empty, we suffer physically, mentally, psychologically

Or maybe not. But when you see the way things should be in Ge 1:2; Rev 22, we can see the difference

But what is the root cause of our misery? How do you diagnose what the root problem is?

Ill: falcon fixing tips – you have to diagnose the problem before you look for a solution to diagnose a problem, compare it to one that is working right, a healthy one, the manual, the specs, the plans

How do you diagnose what the root problem is when different people/worldviews see things differently?

cf Bill Berends worldview questions:

Where do I come from, why am I here

but also, why are some things good and others bad, why do I suffer misfortunes, what is the relationship between good and evil, where do I find salvation

Ill: nuremberg trials; natural justice

God's law tells us

The universe is governed by law; natural laws, criminal law, family law

Ultimately the universe is governed by God's law

Apply: Believe in? Repent from? Prick conscience / prompt will / prime passions/drives

Extend: so what are you going to do about it this week?

Point 2: What is God's law?

From experience/Image: you know how this looks/feels

God's law is to love him completely, and our neighbour as ourself. Mt 22

What is love? Love is more than a feeling; it's about commitment/action;

to hate, reject, fight against Satan and sin, and those forces and influences that serve them

Love God – total devotion, total obedience, total worship

Love neighbour; cf the golden rule: do to others what you would have them do for you

Ill: Good Samaritan

This is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and gave his son for us

Raise the bar: Love others as Christ has loved us

Love is the basis of God's Old Testament covenant conditions/demands Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18

Apply: Believe in? Repent from? Prick conscience / prompt will / prime passions/drives

Extend: so what are you going to do about it this week?

Point 3: We can't live up to this but have a natural tendency to hate God and our neighbour

From experience/Image: you know how this looks/feels

We can't live up to this

2 kinds of sin: transgression, & missing the mark/falling short of the standard – we are totally depraved; everything we do is affected by sin; everything we do falls short of God's standard

We have a natural tendency to hate God and our neighbour Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:23-24; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3

ie not love but hate; we would rather serve ourselves, do what we want, which leads to slavery to sin and Satan

People generally won't admit to hating God, but indifferent. But when we don't have regard for God and what he wants, think of him, consider him in our plans, even go against his will – we don't care about him at all, even worse – rebel against what he wants

cf Ro 1,3

Out of this inadequacy flows our sin & misery – broken relationship with God, others, nature

We need help: the gospel explains where help/salvation can be found

Kingdom vision/Be inspired:

Apply: Believe in? Repent from? Prick conscience / prompt will / prime passions/drives

Extend: so what are you going to do about it this week?

Aim: Understand your problem and look to Jesus for the solution

Intro: The problem: our sin (cause) and misery (result)

We come to understand our sin/misery because God's law tells us Rom. 3:20; 7:7-25

We have problems: we feel empty, we suffer physically, mentally, psychologically

How do you diagnose what the root problem is when different worldviews see things differently?

Ill: falcon fixing tips – you have to diagnose the problem before you look for a solution

to diagnose a problem, compare it to one that is working right, a healthy one, the manual, the specs, the plans

In the Old Testament 'sin' is often defined as, 'missing the mark' – falling short of God's standard

cf Bill Berends worldview questions:

Where do I come from, why am I here

but also, why are some things good and others bad, why do I suffer misfortunes, what is the relationship between good and evil, where do I find salvation

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Ill: Good Samaritan

This is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and gave his son for us

This is the basis of God's Old Testament covenant conditions/demands Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18

post-resurrection: love others as Christ has loved us

2 kinds of sin: transgression, missing the mark/falling short of the standard – we are totally depraved; everything we do is affected by sin; everything we do falls short of God's standard

We can't live up to this but have a natural tendency to hate God and our neighbour Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:23-24; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3

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even worse – rebel against what he wants cf Ro 1,3

Out of this inadequacy flows our sin & misery – broken relationship with God, others, nature

We need help: the gospel explains where help/salvation can be found

Lord's Day 2 Q & A 3

Q. How do you come to know your misery?

A. The law of God tells me.¹

¹ Rom. 3:20; 7:7-25

Q & A 4

Q. What does God's law require of us?

A. Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22--

Love the Lord your God
with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your mind
and with all your strength.^{1,1*}
This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it:

Love your neighbor as yourself.²

All the Law and the Prophets hang
on these two commandments.

¹ Deut. 6:5

² Lev. 19:18

^{*}Earlier and better manuscripts of Matthew 22 omit the words "and with all your strength." They are found in Mark 12:30.

Q & A 5

Q. Can you live up to all this perfectly?

A. No.¹

I have a natural tendency
to hate God and my neighbor.²

¹ Rom. 3:9-20, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10

² Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:23-24; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3

HC LD 2 ser 5

Dear Congregation

When I and the family were still in Sydney, we once had a problem with our car - it began to lose power as Nicky was driving home. And we had no idea what it was, so it was time to limp off to the mechanic. And they spent days on it – 2 guys, off and on, trying one idea after another, cancelling out one possibility after another. Eventually, they even had to call Toyota in, with some special computerised diagnostic device, and between the 3 or them they finally settled on what the problem must be.

It just shows you how hard it can sometimes be to diagnose the cause of a problem. We know there's a problem. But what's the cause. And how do we fix it?

And you probably have similar stories with your health. You know something's not right – you don't have the energy you usually do, you're off your food, you're always tired, and you don't know why. And so eventually you go to the doctor, only to discover that these are the symptoms for a thousand different possibilities. The doctor recommends a barrage of tests, with still no guarantee that you'll know what the problem is at the end of it all.

And last Sunday night, as we started looking at the Heidelberg Catechism, it introduced 3 things. Our ultimate and most basic problem – the root cause of all our problems and the solution to that problem. And our appropriate response to that solution. Tonight we think some more especially about the problem.

Point 1

In fact, *sometimes you don't even realise you have a problem, do you?* It creeps up over a year or two as the valves of your car slowly carbon up, or as your arteries slowly clog with cholesterol. It's only when you finally compare how things are performing compared to a few years ago, or a doctor compares you to what could be expected, that you're told there's a problem.

And in the same way, *some people don't even realise how miserable their lives really are*. As far as they can tell, this is just normal – this is just the way things are – everybody they know has the same sort of destructive, purposeless, lifestyle. We all think the way we grow up, eat, conduct ourselves, is just the way things are, until we're old enough to stay at a friend's house, or eat out, or mingle in another level of society, and realise that there's a whole universe of possibilities out there that we weren't aware of. And some of those possibilities are better than the ones we're used to.

And so some people just accept that this broken and suffering world we live in is just the way things are. The pain and tears and struggle is the only alternative. We can't hope for anything more or better. And when we die, well that's the end. Consistent Athiests have no choice but to take that approach. Modern secular philosophy takes that approach. Read up on Nietzsche, the philosopher, some time. He's considered the father of post-modernism. He lived out this approach to its logical conclusion of despair, and suffered a mental breakdown at age 45 from which he never recovered.

So why do Christians believe that this isn't the way it has to be, and that there is a problem? Why do we believe that things could be better? Why do we believe that there is a solution?

And we only believe it, because like the mechanic and the doctor, we have original plans and specifications that tell us what things should be like. We have a diagnostic tool that tells us that something is wrong and needs to be fixed.

We can go to passages in the Bible like Genesis 1 and 2, and Revelation 21 and 22. These passages give *the plans* for the way creation was intended to be. And as we compare the way things are now with the way things are described there, we come to realise that our existence today is a pretty miserable one. Things aren't the way they should be. Suffering and misery aren't meant to be part of God's good creation.

But then, what do you do when it comes to *diagnosing the root cause of the problem*? What tool do you use? And as the Catechism reminds us, the diagnostic tool to use is God's law. You can go to passages in the

Bible like the 10 commandments, and there we have a diagnostic tool for our problem. You can see those commandments developed and applied in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' teachings, like the Sermon on the Mount – and in all of that we are given a diagnostic tool so that we can understand the problem.

You see, ***God is a law-giver***. He is ***the*** law-giver. As we study the universe, we discover that it's governed by laws – laws of physics, laws of chemistry – the universe runs moment by moment according to universal laws.

And society's realise that, and apply the same approach when it comes to how their society is conducted – some things are defined as good and right, some things are defined as bad and wrong, and law breakers are punished for their crimes. People instinctively follow in the footsteps of the creator – the law-giver.

But as you look at different societies and the laws they put in place, you discover that ***they all put the line between good and bad in a different place***. They understand that there needs to be a line, but they can't agree on where the line should be.

In fact, if you attended the worldview lectures by Bill Berends, you would have come to understand that ***there are 3 different basic understandings of how good and evil relate to each other***. Some worldviews, like deism and atheism - which we're pretty familiar with here in the West - have simply accepted that both good and evil have always existed. They just are – which leads to a dualistic understanding of things.

Other worldviews, like eastern mysticism and the New Age - which we're becoming much more familiar with here in the West - believe that good and evil are one and the same. They hold that the distinction between them is just an illusion, or that they exist in balance, and we should just embrace them both.

And then some worldviews, like Judaism and Christianity believe that evil is the perversion of created goodness. Evil wasn't there in the beginning – it's something to be gotten rid of.

Which means that we shouldn't be too surprised if many non-Christians take a completely different view of evil, and what we should do with it, than we do. It means that we need to carefully go back to the diagnostic tool God has given us, if we're going to even understand our sin and misery and evil the way it really is.

So how do we come to know, and accurately understand, our problem – our sin and misery? Only by going back to the Bible - to God's description of the way things could be, the way they were originally intended to be, and the way they are now. Only by going back to God's law, and carefully coming to understand things in the way the Creator God - the original law-giver - describes them to us.

Point 2

Now, when it comes to diagnosing why your car isn't running properly, mechanics are smart, they try to narrow the problem down and start there. There's a thousand things that are happening as your engine runs, but chances are a problem is to do with one of a few basic systems, like the electrical system, or the fuel system.

It's the same with your health. If you come to the doctor not feeling very well, he'll quickly try to narrow it down to your digestive system, breathing, nervous system, blood circulation, or something like that.

And once the problem has been narrowed down to one of these basic systems, you move on from there.

And fortunately for us, *God's law can also be distilled down to a couple of basics* on which everything else is built. So even though it's important to read and understand God's entire law as it's given in the Bible, as you work at understanding how it all fits together, you can build your understanding on a couple of basics that make up the foundation.

Jesus gave that foundation himself in Matthew 22 when the Pharisees tested him on these things. He said the greatest commandment is to love God completely with everything that we are, and the second is to love our neighbour as ourself. All of God's law, and the writings of the prophets, are built on these 2 commandments. Jesus lifts these 2 laws out of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

A good question to ask though, is what is love. Love, nowadays, is used to describe everything from the mushy feeling a teenager gets, to the way I feel about my new printer, to the sense of dependence someone has toward their abusive partner. But what does God mean by love?

And you realise from the Bible that God means a lot more than a feeling when he talks about love. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives the *2nd great command* as the Golden Rule: ‘Do to others what you would have them do to you.’ Love is a selfless attitude towards others, followed up by appropriate action.

Paul gives some detail to that in 1 Corinthians 13 - the passage on love that we probably all know so well, “love is patient, kind, it doesn’t boast, it isn’t proud ...” and so on. God’s idea of love is deciding to humbly relate to others in the way that works for their best – putting them and their welfare ahead of our own. Love is a selfless commitment to the well-being of others.

If we want to see *the ultimate example of love*, we only have to think about what God was willing to do for us. John says in his first letter, ‘This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.’

And because we have now seen a love in practice that is so much greater than our own love for ourselves, Jesus raises the bar. In John 13 he calls us to love one another, not just as we love ourselves, but as he has loved us - willing even to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others.

And that’s thinking about the *2nd great command*. But, what about the *1st great command* – love for God.

And when you apply all of this to our relationship with God, you begin to get a clearer understanding of what worship really is – total selfless commitment and devotion to God as our King and heavenly Father – total selfless unquestioning obedience to him as our God, as our Master.

Bill Berends again, helped those of us who attended his sessions to see that when you apply this kind of relationship to God, then you understand true worship. And when you apply this to others, then you understand true fellowship. When you apply this to creation, then you understand true stewardship.

And thinking back to where we started, when you compare humanity's relationship with God, each other, and the world, with this possibility, then you begin to understand the depth of our sin and misery – just how far we have fallen from the way things originally were.

Point 3

You also start to realise that *the world generally has no interest in loving God in this kind of way*. People generally don't want to give total selfless commitment and devotion to God as their King in unquestioning worship and obedience.

And people generally don't want to love *others* in this kind of way. People don't want to selflessly and sacrificially love others in the kind of way that God through Jesus has loved us. They want others to love them that way.

And people generally don't want to love *planet earth* in this kind of way. People generally don't want to tend and care for the world - they want to exploit it for their own benefit.

But that would also mean that *we're not inclined to love God, our neighbour, and creation, but to hate them*.

And I know that people generally wouldn't put it that way – that sounds a bit harsh.

It's not that they hate God, they just ignore him, neglect him. Some would even say they believe there is a God, they just don't know who he is or what he's like, they're not sure that we can even know him well enough to really know what he wants.

And it's not that they hate other people, they just prefer not to associate with too many of them – people expect too much, they're too demanding, holding down close relationships is too difficult, serving others is too demeaning.

And they don't hate the earth. In fact they're green at heart. They think it's a real pity about the hole in the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect. But it hasn't affected how they live their lives, how much energy they consume, how much carbon is pumped into the atmosphere on their behalf.

The thing is, we might prefer to tone down the language, but God just calls it as it is - if you don't love, you hate. And so Romans 8 describes humanity's basic attitude towards God in contrast to his basic attitude towards us, 'the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.' And Titus 3 describes humanity's basic attitude towards each other as one of, 'malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.'

We have a natural tendency to hate God and our neighbour. Instead of being naturally inclined to love in the selfless way that God does, we have had a natural tendency to go the other way since the fall into sin in Genesis 3. And it's from this basic orientation, that goes completely against God's nature and his will for our lives, that our sin and misery flow. Our problems stem from a broken relationship with God, each other, and creation, caused by sin.

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All of this leaves us with a pretty negative picture. But the positive thing about getting a negative diagnosis from the mechanic or the doctor is that at least you now know you have a problem. You know what the problem is. And you know what you can do about it.

And we've only had hints tonight about the solution. We'll look at that a lot more in weeks to come. But of course the solution lies in the one who was willing to come to earth, sent by his loving Father, and loving us enough to sacrifice himself for us in total obedience to his heavenly Father. Jesus became one of us, loving his father as we should love him, loving us as we should love each other, and loving creation as we should love it, so that we might have the solution we need to our problem. As we put our faith and trust in Jesus, as we commit ourselves to obeying him and our heavenly father without question, then we come to have the solution that we need for our sin and misery. We may still be naturally inclined to go the wrong way. But we

have peace with God. And by the power of the Holy Spirit the tide of our sinfulness has turned. We have the ability again to begin to love in the way that God wants.