

Antioch School *Growing Disciples*

Christian Basics 2 Knowing God – Redemption

Getting through to Us!

Perhaps you have seen the slogan, “If God seems a million miles away, guess who moved.” That slick slogan has quite a point for those people who ignore God and then object strongly when he doesn’t seem quick to answer some cry for help. But, looking at the whole human situation, it is just a little too slick.

Earlier we noted that things were different after the Fall. There was not only the human reaction of trying to hide from God. From God’s side there was a problem – “he loves and wants to relate to the people of the world, yet their sin puts them under his wrath, under his judgment.”

My unease about taking that slogan too far comes from the fact that God is right here – not a million miles away at all – trying to get through to this race gone astray. That, of course, is leading us towards next week’s session about Jesus, who he is and why he came. But at this point we must think about the importance of redemption if revelation is to be complete.

The Mess We’re In

The Genesis account describes the human race as the pinnacle of creation – made in the image of God and with authority over the other creatures (1.26), responsible to “cultivate and guard” the garden (2.15). The Psalmist is impressed by the same point (8.3-6) -

“When I look at the sky, which you have made,
at the moon and the stars, which you set in their places -
what is man, that you think of him;
mere man, that you care for him?
Yet you made him inferior only to yourself;
you crowned him with glory and honour.
You appointed him ruler over everything you made;
you placed him over all creation...”

We noted before that people were created “with a strong creative urge, with the responsibility of oversight and (most importantly) with the possibility of and need for relationship with God.”

But something serious has happened! We don’t exactly live in the Garden of Eden any more! Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit!

Just exactly what was “the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad” (Genesis 2.17)? We are not told. But there was another tree right alongside it – “the tree that gives life” (v.9). They had a choice – they could choose life, but if they chose to know “good and evil” the choice of absolute life would no longer be open to them.

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) is well-known as the author of the Chronicles of Narnia written for children. This well-known scholar of Oxford and Cambridge became a Christian in 1931. He wrote over forty books, the majority of which were designed to point unbelievers to Christ, to explain

Christianity to seekers and to instruct those who were young in the faith towards spiritual maturity. Among his writings is a science fiction trilogy – *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra (Voyage to Venus)* and *That Hideous Strength*.

Perelandra imagines that life has just been created on Venus. Two human beings appear on the planet, one a representative of evil, the other a representative of the Lord. In this very different land the Lord has prohibited something quite different from the forbidden fruit of Genesis. The temptation takes the form of a long debate in which the representative of evil presses hard that this is given to be disobeyed, so that they can grow in independence and maturity.

Ransom, God’s representative, says, “I think that He made one law of that kind in order that there might be obedience. In all these other matters what you call obeying Him is but doing what seems good in your own eyes also. Is love content with that? You do them, indeed, because they are His will, but not only because they are His will. Where can you taste the joy of obeying unless He bids you do something for which His bidding is the only reason?” (p.107)

Lewis is suggesting that the key is relationship with God and that the chief element in the temptation is the choice of autonomy. Separation from God is death. We are meant to know and love him, and to live responsible to him.

Adam and Eve were made innocent. They had not faced a moral test. But under test, they did not become wise by eating the forbidden fruit. Knowing good and evil, they experienced guilt and fear (Genesis 3.10), heard the judgment of God and began to find the world itself a less friendly place. Their choice affected their offspring as well as themselves – all suffered by the exclusion from Eden and separation from God, all faced the pain and penalty of alienation from God as well as the tendency to do things wrongly.

All of these consequences are part of what has traditionally been called “**original sin**”. That is a term that can be easily misunderstood. We can fail to see that we are sinners because we commit sin. We cannot just sheet the blame onto our first ancestors.

“Passing the buck” is a very early game. It went like this -
ADAM: *Look, Lord, it was this woman you gave me. She’s to blame!*

EVE: *Lord, it was this serpent’s fault. He tempted me!*

And if a third voice had been given permission to speak -
SERPENT: *Look, Lord, you made me!*

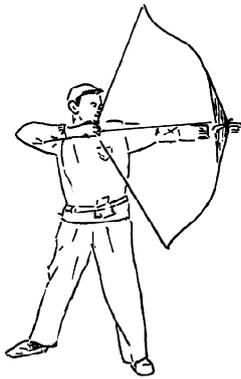
It is interesting to notice how often people put God in the dock. “If there really is a God of love, why did he let this or that happen?” “Where were you, God, when I needed you?”

God allows us to face moral testing. James charts the path from temptation to sin (James 1.12-15). But with temptation there is always a way out, always the possibility of choosing God’s will (1 Cor.10.12-13).

The Bible speaks about sin in a number of different ways. Basically it is helpful to realise that it is a positive and deliberate act of aggression against God – **lawlessness** (1 Jn.3.4), wilful breaking of God’s law. I think of Zacchaeus here (Lk.19.1-9). He had deliberately chosen to collect taxes for the Roman oppressors. For this he was unpopular. But worse still, he used his



position to cheat people. He had deliberately broken God's law.



But sin may also be negative. The archer has good intentions, but **doesn't hit the target**. The earnest person striving after good still can't make it. As Paul put it, "Everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence" (Rom.3.23). My thought goes here to Nicodemus (Jn.3.1-16), the earnest Pharisee who still couldn't see or enter the Kingdom of God because he needed to be "born again"! Paul was speaking from

his own experience. He could say, "As far as a person can be righteous by obeying the commands of the Law, I was without fault" (Phil.3.6b). Without fault and yet listen to this, "So I find that this law is at work: when I want to do what is good, what is evil is the only choice I have. My inner being delights in the law of God. But I see a different law at work in my body – a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of. It makes me a prisoner to the law of sin which is at work in my body..." (Rom.7.20-23). As the Henry Twells puts it in AHB169 -

"and they who fain would serve thee best
are conscious most of wrong within."

The Bible concludes that **everyone is a sinner** – not only the non-Jew (the Gentile), but the Jew as well, not only those who try to break every rule in the book, but those who try to keep every rule in the book! The Jews – and especially the Pharisees – liked to think that they were superior to everyone else, but, Paul says, "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin" (Rom.3.9b).

But the seriousness of our human condition is that "**sin pays its wage – death**" (Rom.6.23a). "Hell" has become a light expletive. But it is pictured as a grim reality, the destiny of sinners. Heaven is no place for sinners – "Nothing that is impure will enter the city, nor anyone who does shameful things or tells lies... Nothing that is under God's curse will be found in the city" (Rev.21.27a; 22.3a).

We need to understand the seriousness of sin (all sin is worthy of the death penalty) and the holiness of God.

The Plan of Redemption

So God's plan of Revelation had to include a plan for the Redemption of the human race.

The very first hint of this is contained in the account of the Fall. In Gen.3.15 we read the Lord's words to the snake, "I will make you and the woman hate each other; her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite their feet." "Offspring" is literally "seed" (singular) in the original Hebrew, and this has been seen, not simply as the general enmity between the human race and the serpent, but as a first pointer to redemption in Christ. To quote Lee Haines, "When this verse is viewed in the light of the Christian gospel, it is impossible not to see a veiled reference to Christ, the God-man who was indeed the seed of the woman, and by whose death and resurrection and intercession man is redeemed and Satan defeated" (*The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, vol.1, part I, p.38).

The record goes on to say, "And the Lord God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and his wife, and he clothed them" (v.21). This involved the killing of an animal and has long been regarded as the first atoning sacrifice for human sin. Henceforth, the human approach to God must be on the basis of an atonement. The alternative is judgment. And God approaches humankind in revelation on the basis of an atonement – or in judgment.

Later, the whole layout of tabernacle/temple and the system of sacrifices that took place there highlighted this need for atonement. But they didn't just represent separation from God, but his desire to reveal himself to his sinful people.

This work of redemption focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ and will be receiving specific consideration in Session 2. It is helpful here, however, to consider a few of the key words used for this part of God's revelation of himself.

Where sin is likened to slavery, a captivity which man cannot himself break, **Redemption** represents the intervention of an outside Person who pays the price man cannot pay. Mark 10.45 is one of the passages that refer to redemption.

The word **Covenant** refers to a special mutual agreement God established with the people of Israel, sealed with a sacrifice (Gen.24.1-8). Jeremiah looks forward to a new covenant being established (31.31-34). The New Testament declares that this has been established through the death of Jesus Christ (Lk.22.19-20; Heb.9.1-15).

Reconciliation refers to bringing together two parties whose relationship has been broken. It is closely related to the word **Atonement** (the English word comes from at-one-ment). The day of atonement was the only time the high-priest entered the Most Holy Place in the temple, and then only with the blood of the sin-offering (Lev.16.1-19). This in fact pointed to the reconciliation Christ would bring about (Rom.5.1-11).

We note in each of these cases that, because sin has broken the relationship between humankind and God, there must be an acceptable sacrifice. But these measures in Old Testament times were only partial and temporary. They were preparing the way for the perfect sacrifice which would open the possibility of complete restoration.

God has made himself known to us. But, to get through to us, it took Redemption as well as Revelation! Isn't that wonderful? How do you respond to the God who is like that?

Some Key Words:

Redemption – the price paid by someone else.

Covenant – a mutual agreement sealed with a sacrifice.

Reconciliation – bringing together two parties.

Atonement – English from "at-one-ment".

For reflection...

In what ways does human sin affect the society we live in?

“Everyone is a sinner” – what is the practical evidence for that?

“Sin pays its wage – death!” That seems rather drastic! Is sin really as bad as that?

What are some of the things the human race has tried to do in the light of the seriousness of sin?

Think for a moment about redemption. While people were directed to offer sacrifices to God, it was essentially about what God was doing about human sin. It is important to grasp the difference between our attempts to “do something” and God’s offer of reconciliation.

Why is redemption important in coming to know God?

Understanding Judaism

The name “Judaism” refers to the religion of the Jews in contrast to that of the Old Testament from which it was derived. The two focal points in its development were the two destructions of the Jerusalem temple in 586BC and 70AD, which ended the centrality of sacrifice found in the Old Testament. Above all it was encouraged by the widespread dispersion of Jews, both West and East, which made the Law the centre around which Jewish life and religion had to revolve outside Palestine.

During the period between the Testaments, Judaism was developing in various directions – e.g. there were the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Hellenists. But the situation created by the destruction of the Jewish state in 70AD and confirmed by the crushing of the Bar-Kochba revolt in 135 left the Pharisaic interpretation of Judaism without rivals. It reached its full development by 500, its authoritative documents being the Talmud,



composed of the *Mishnah* and *Gemara*, and the *Midrashim* (official interpretations of the OT books).

Judaism has shown an ability to adapt itself to pressure and persecution, to minority social status, and to changing cultural circumstances without changing its essential nature. In the nineteenth century, under the influence of modern thought, a reform, or liberal, movement began and has steadily increased. Other Jews have turned to materialism, Marxism (Karl Marx himself was of Jewish extraction), or a religionless nationalism.

Judaism is essentially a historical religion based on God’s election of Israel, shown above all in the Exodus, giving of the Law, and conquest of Canaan. Though Judaism recognises the existence of the righteous among the nations, who will have “a share in the world to come,” a full knowledge of God’s will and the possibility of carrying it out are confined to Jewry. The possession of the Law gives real meaning to God’s election, and any Gentile who is prepared to accept “the yoke of the Law” is welcomed into the community of Israel.

The Jewish doctrine of God is not only monotheistic, but strongly anti-Trinitarian. The transcendence of God is stressed in a way that makes any concept of incarnation impossible.

Chief emphasis is placed on the Torah – “Law” or “Instruction.” The Torah is seen to consist of two parts – written and oral. The written Torah contains 613 precepts, 365 negative and 248 positive; the oral Torah extends these precepts to cover all life and all its contingencies. Except for adaptations to more recent conditions, the oral Torah has found its definitive expression in the *Talmud*, to which modern developments must conform.

Though the system is legalistic, it is stressed that in carrying out the commandment the heart must be directed to God and it should be done for its own sake, out of love to God, and not purely for a reward.

The Torah is seen as a standard to live by. As a result, commandments that weighed too heavily on the community have been moderated or bypassed. In addition, a genuine threat to life releases the Jew from all commandments except those prohibiting idolatry (this includes Christian baptism!), murder and adultery. These factors, together with the disappearance of the sacrificial system have tended to diminish the sense of sin.

The messianic hope never took on a fixed form. It is universally accepted that God will yet set up his perfect rule on earth, and it was generally agreed that this would be achieved through the Messiah. Mainly due to repeated disappointments, he has become for many the personification of the hope of the kingdom of God. With this was linked the expectation of the resurrection of the body. Under Greek influence the concept of the immortality of the soul was gradually accepted. This has led to a blurring of the hope of a future life and bodily resurrection. For the Liberal Jew, future life is purely spiritual.

Movements within Judaism have included the popular mystical movement in Eastern Europe known as Hasidism and the rise of the Liberal Synagogue with its shift from the Torah to prophetic ethics. The advent of the State of Israel has normally added a strong nationalistic colouring.

In Israel itself, Judaism is under the control of the stricter traditionalists. The tendency is for the more obvious demands of the Law to be treated as national customs without religious significance.

Christian and Jew...

The question as to how Christians are to regard the Jews has a long history. The earliest believers had, in fact been practising Jews before their conversion. In their evangelism of Jews, it was therefore natural for them to draw their hearers' attention to the obvious historical fact that the Jewish people and leaders had rejected Jesus as Messiah and were instrumentally responsible for his crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. They did so with the very conscious call for repentance and offer of divine forgiveness (as in Acts 2.22-24,26-39).

Throughout the story in Acts, it was often the unbelieving Jews who instigated the persecution of Christians (as in 13.44-52; 14.1-5,19-20).

The basic question before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 was whether or not Christianity was just a branch of the Jewish faith. And what was to be the relationship, not just between Jewish and Gentile believers, but between Christianity and Jewish practices such as circumcision.

- Reflect on the words of Jeremiah 31.31-34.
- What is the significance of the words of Jesus in Matthew 9.14-17?

Increasingly the Christian Church became a Gentile rather than a Jewish movement. The major NT passage on this theme is Romans 9-11.

- Note what Paul says in 10.1-2. Should we, as Christians, have an earnest desire and prayer that the Israelites will be saved? Why?
- Gentiles have no cause for arrogance – note 11.13-24. God's purpose is that finally Israel will turn back with faith in the Messiah and be saved (v. 26).

Francis of Assisi 1182-1226

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there were great contrasts between rich and poor. The Church was seen among the rich, with Pope and bishops as wealthy princes. In contrast to this is the story of Francis of Assisi.



Francis was the son of Pietro de Bernardone, a wealthy Italian cloth merchant. He received the usual education for his time and enjoyed a carefree life as a popular youth of Assisi, an old Roman town on a hilltop overlooking the valley of the Tiber. His father had dreams of knighthood for his son.

One minor military campaign was enough for Francis. Perhaps it was while suffering from severe fever in

prison, meditating on the meaning of life, that he determined to turn his back on the world and his father's dreams. Leaving home in a ragged cloak and a rope-belt taken from a scare-crow, he wandered the countryside with a few followers, begging from the rich, giving to the poor, and preaching the joys of "apostolic poverty."

In 1209 a sermon on Matthew 10.7-10 impressed him as a personal admonition to take up a life of apostolic poverty, and he began preaching brotherly love and repentance. That year he composed a simple "Rule" for his little brotherhood, consisting chiefly of Christ's appeal to take up the cross, his advice to the rich young ruler and his directions on sending out the apostles. With this Rule Francis and his companions succeeded in gaining the approval of Innocent III in 1212 for their little preaching band. Since Innocent required them to receive minor orders, they called themselves the Friars Minor. We call them the Franciscans.

Setting out on a course of preaching and caring for the sick and poor, the Friars came together at Pentecost for a meeting at Portiuncula in Assisi. In 1212 the second order was founded when an heiress of Assisi, Clare, was invested by Francis and formed the order for women, the Poor Clares.

Francis' vision was for the world and he began missions to Syria (1212) and Morocco (1213-1214), but was unable to complete them due to illness or other misfortune. Then in 1219 a crusading expedition to Egypt gave him a new opportunity. With eleven companions he accompanied the army to the Middle East where he tried unsuccessfully to convert Sultan Kameel of Egypt. From Egypt he visited holy places in Palestine and it was more than a year before he returned to Italy.

During his absence differences arose among the brothers and Francis realised that he was a model, not a manager. In 1223 he surrendered the administration of the brotherhood to Peter de Cantaneo. Cardinal Ugolino, who later became Pope Gregory IX, admired Francis but wanted the movement to become an agent of advancement of the Roman Church. He would reform the church by giving the Franciscans authority; Francis wanted to reform the world by preaching Christlike humility.

Francis spent the remaining years of his life in solitude and prayer. He had lived to see his ideal changed. He feared the spread of worldly power; he dreaded the growth of learning, lest the service of the poor be neglected. He died in Assisi on October 3rd 1226.

Next week: Who is Jesus? Why did he come?

- John 1.1-14
- John 8.31-59
- Matthew 16.13-28
- Matthew 17.1-13
- Matthew 1.18-25
- Mark 10.35-45
- John 18.28-38