

The Great Paradox



TouchPoint 6

I (Mic) hope that you are finding these TouchPoints captivating! The more I learn about who God is and what He really intends to do, the more I want to live in response to Him. I hope it turns out that way for you, too.

As I said in TouchPoint 5, God's choice of a solution for humanity's inherent evil was totally unique and unexpected. Most people would probably just come in with a heavy hand and whip everyone into shape if they had the kind of power God has!

But Jesus' intentional affect was different: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-3; 14, New International Version)

I like the adjective John used here in the first verse. Jesus is described as the "Word", which was made flesh and lived where we live. He was full of grace and truth.



The word "Word" says a lot! John is telling us here that Jesus' very life speaks of who God is. Jesus is the very expression of God, of His character, of His love. What questions we might have about God can be answered in Jesus!

As God, Jesus could have intimidated everyone into being good. But that only works for awhile. If your heart's not in your actions, at some point you'll stop acting how you're being forced to!

But God seems to have this thing about free choice. He wants to win you to His side, not force you there. Because of this, to some people Jesus looked and acted like anything but God.

To still others, mostly those deeply invested in the organized religion of His day, He didn't seem very God-like because Jesus seemed to flout the rules of "proper" religious behavior. "Surely no self-respecting God would behave like this," they thought over and over again. One example will show you what I mean.

“He wants to win you to his side, not force you there.”

“On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’ Then He put His hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

“Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, ‘There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.’

“The Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?’

“When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing” (Luke 13:10-17).

Fascinating, isn't it? The religious types were so offended that Jesus didn't play by their "rules", they actually could not allow themselves to be wowed by the miracle of a woman who's been bent over for the last 18 years being instantly healed!

What are some of the "rules" of religion that you have heard about or that you've experienced in a negative way? _____

A Strange Equation

What I'm about to tell you now is very important. I can't tell you exactly why things are this way, I can only tell you what they are. When God decided to solve the problem of evil in our world, He used a two-pronged approach. First, He would give His life in place of those who had sinned (and that's pretty much everybody), and He would do it in such a way that we would be convinced of His love. Remember, He wants us to be with Him because we want to be there, not because we have to.

Now, I can't say for sure why the very Son of God had to die. As one theologian put it, "This is the strange and miraculous equation devised by God and worked out on the cross." Evidently sin demands a price. Remember Romans 6.23 from a few TouchPoints ago? "The wages of sin is death." That's what we deserve, and that's what we'd get were it not for Jesus.

That Jesus paid the price for our sin is a foundational belief of the Christian faith. If this is not true, if this is not at the center, then there is no point in hanging around with Jesus any more.

I am going to list a few places in the Bible where this is expressed. It is so important, I want you to look each one up, and then write what you think is important in each of them:

Philippians 2:5-8 _____

Romans 3:22-25 _____

Romans 5:1-2; 6-8 _____

2 Corinthians 5.21 _____

Ephesians 2.1-10 _____

I hope you didn't skip reading those texts and thinking about what you found important in them. They are parts of the Bible that really give you the heart of the mission of Jesus. They tell of the great paradox that only through the act of the Most Powerful becoming the most susceptible, to then accept a death sentence for the crimes of others could our problem be solved. Only through death could life come about. Only through sacrifice could loyalty be won. I would like to summarize the concepts of these five passages for you:

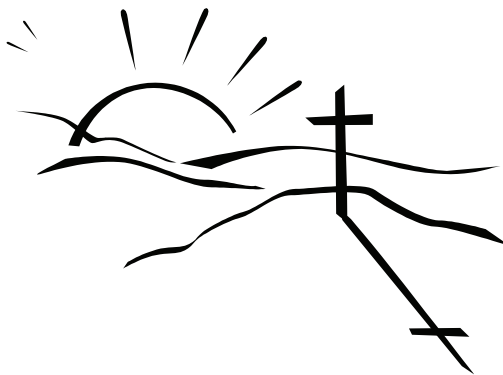
Jesus, though He was actually God, gave up his God-ness to take on our human frailty, and submit Himself to death. He did this because we had no righteousness of our own (that means we are no longer pure and without sin as Adam and Eve were when they were first created). We cannot live as evil, sinful people in the presence of God, so God provided a way that the righteousness we need, we can get from Him because He Himself atoned for our sinfulness by dying the death that we should have died because of our sin.

The act of his willing death is accepted in the mind of the Father God and sinners who profess their belief and loyalty to Him may receive total pardon for their sins.

God was willing to do all this before we cleaned ourselves up! While we were still in our sinfulness, Jesus died for us. By His death, we can exchange our depraved and willful state for His perfect righteousness.

And to top it all off, all this is given for free to anyone who is willing to believe in Him and follow Him with their lives! Yes, you read that right. For free.

To not accept His generous offer is about like hearing the doorbell ring, opening your front door, seeing the van and balloons and TV cameras that go along with the awarding of the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes and slamming the door in the announcer's face!



Maybe that's because we're so mixed up about what's best, that we are willing to sell out our future to make ourselves more comfortable in the present.

But let me remind you of where this is all heading. I've surfaced it before in prior TouchPoints. When time wraps

up on this planet (yes, the Bible says such a time will come), Jesus will take His people off this planet, transport them to heaven, heal every scar, every sore place, every defect of your body, your mind, and your soul.

When He takes you away, it is the beginning of what the Bible calls “eternity”, a return to the Edenic wonder, purity, loveliness, and innocence that we were created to live in. And it will be that way forever – for we will have all learned our lesson about evil, and it will never again be chosen as an option.

And like the prize in the Cracker Jack box, because the righteousness of God is ours when we accept him, we can once again be in His presence. We won't be afraid any longer. We won't be suspicious of Him or each other any more. No one will be selfish, no one will have any inclination to harm someone else. Time with God Himself will be so precious to all of us, that we will never choose the way of alienation ever again.

This is True Love

We've all heard the phrase “if it's too good to be true, it probably is.” This is the one exception to that maxim. It's almost hard to conceive that anyone would walk away from believing in God's Son Jesus with all He is offering – for free.

“This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us...”

I'll end this TouchPoint with two more texts, but this time I'll spell them out for you. I think it would be great if you marked these two in your Bible (yes, it's ok to do that...), but for now, I just want you to hold this TouchPoint in your hand and read the words, and let them wash over you. Maybe you've never really know true love before. If you hear what these words are saying, you do now.

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:8-11, NIV).

“In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:5-14) •

The Great Paradox

Questions

Why do you think Jesus is named “Word” in John 1.1-4?

What about Jesus made it hard for some people to recognize Him as God? (because He didn't force people to be good)

Who were the ones most offended by Jesus?

What is the foundation belief of all Christians?

What are some of the Bible passages that tell about this foundational belief?

What is it that you must do in order to be saved from evil and live forever?

What does your salvation cost you?

What did it cost Jesus?

Re-read the Ephesians 1 text. Write down the words that tell you that this was not something God was forced to do, but that He chose to do, and that He did it with a heart full of love.

Please send this answer sheet, either by e-mail or land mail

ARTH Bible School
P. O. Box 180118
Dallas, TX 75218
preach@americanreligious.org