

Title: Tarabithia and the Gospel

Text: 1 Timothy 2.5-6

Theme: Why Christ is our only hope

Series: Living the Cross-Centered Life – pt.4 (chapter 5)

Prop Stmt. Only Christ can rescue us from sin, because only Christ can satisfy the demands of God.

It promised to be a cloudy day in S. Florida. Rebecca (my soon to be 17 year old) solution for this vacation dilemma was to head for the mall. I would just as soon have a root canal or my toe nails extracted with a pair of pliers, there was no Home Depot in sight, so Arianna and I decided to look for a movie. We do not go to movies very often, which means that I am often woefully ignorant of what is playing. I do not see that as a problem, by the way. So, I had to find out real quick what was showing. Bridge over Tarabithia appeared to be safe. This classic children's story (that I confess, I had never heard of it, and I really try to hear of such things) had been made into a movie and according to the reviews it was very faithful to the original story. It was promoted as a classic family film, without objectionable material, etc. Figuring that it at least ranked higher than a root canal, we decided to check it out.

Had I known that the story of William Wilberforce and his fight for the abolition of slavery in England and the role of John Newton (former slave-trader) now converted believer, pastor and song-writer – Amazing Grace, was showing, we would have seen that, but at the theater we were at, it wasn't offered.

Anyway, we saw Bridge over Tarabithia. Wow! I was impressed with how skillfully, the writer and now the director, presented such objectionable material. Sex? No. Language? Realistic, but very minor. Violence? Huge! But not what you are thinking. The violence was to the gospel. The worldview that this movie preached was presented in a way that it was so loud, and so compelling, and so deafening to all detractors that I have applaud the talent that put this together. The story is set up with a family out in a rural setting trying to make ends meet. They are a conservative, plainly dressed family of 5 children. The older girls fight each other and their mom. The 4<sup>th</sup> child (a girl) gets all of the affection from the dad. The baby gets all of the affection from the mom, and the middle child, a 10 or 11 year old boy is basically left to himself. He is ridiculed mercilessly at school, on the bus, at the playground and basically ignored at home. He has a flair for drawing, which means he has an imagination.

A new girl comes to school. She dresses in a free spirit sort of way and is immediately the brunt of ridicule. She is a neighbor to the boy, and they eventually form a friendship that centers upon their crossing a river and exploring the woods that with their imagination turns into the kingdom of Tarabithia. Fighting their enemies in this land is what helps them to face their enemies at school, and for the boy at home. But, in order to do that, they have to free their minds, and open their minds to be able to imagine. Their new found courage helps them stand up to the bullies, and you want to see them vindicated, because life, especially for the boy is particularly difficult both at school and

home. His dad cuts him no slack at all, and the dad presented in a way that it is easy to dislike him.

One day, the girl asks the boy if she could go to church with him. Her family never goes, his family always does. He tells her that she wouldn't like it, besides she would have to wear a dress. She laughs and assures him that she does own dresses. She ends up going, and the scene in church is brief as they sing, the old rugged cross. On the way home, in the back of a pick-up truck, the 4<sup>th</sup> girl spills the family secrets. "If you don't believe everything the way they do, God will damn you to hell forever!" The neighbor girl looks at her friend and asks him – do you really believe that? He says, "I guess so." And then she says, "You believe in God because you have to, and you don't even like it." "I believe in God, and I don't have to, but I like it, but I don't believe that God goes around damning people to hell, he is too busy having fun to do that."

Bam! Right there, the audience is forced to make a decision. Whose side are you on? Are you on the side where God goes around sending people to hell if you don't believe the Bible like these narrow-minded, always fighting, depressing, bitter, mean-spirited parents do, or are you not attracted to the free-spirit, life is a blast, where the dad dances with his daughter as they paint the living room with a fresh color in order for the sun to dance like fire on its walls, where life is full of possibilities instead of problems, where God is just having fun? Which one would you choose? It's skillfully presented as a no-brainer.

When the neighbor girl dies in a tragic accident, the little boy is tormented by the fact that she could be in hell. His father has a change of heart, and assures his son, that God would never send a little girl like that to hell.

Two weeks ago, we spent a great deal of time discussing the issue of a feeling-driven life, verses a cross and crown-driven life. Feelings are a part of our lives. They are part of what it means to be human, something that Buddhism vainly attempts to get rid of. But, while we were made by God with feelings, we were not made to be driven by them. But, that is our world, and sadly, that has for many, many years now, been the atmosphere of the church. We live with so much of life based on emotion. Emotional appeals are therefore, so effective, because they move people and as a result they appear to be the truth, and it seems that most people are not trained to be able to think propositionally, categorically, and empirically, but instead allow their emotions to be yanked and jerked around. The fact is, emotional appeals are effective in gaining loyalty from an audience. I am not attacking emotions, I am attacking emotionalism.

If emotions are the foundation, then "truth" is going to be determined by what I am feeling at the moment. If I am emotionally moved by the suffering of Christ, then "truth" for me (at least at that moment) is, I love Christ because of his suffering. But, if I am emotionally moved by the way this little girl in Bridge over Tarabithia helps to rescue this little boy, then "truth" for me (at least at that moment), is that God has to take her to heaven because of all the good that she has done. And that, my friends is our world. It feels and calls it thinking. That is why, for all intents and purposes people live as if there

is no absolute truth. Therefore, the gospel, as you define it, is good only because it seems to work for you, but don't push your religion on me, because while it may work for you, it doesn't work for everyone else.

Now, this study on Sunday nights is a review of the gospel. I am assuming that you, my audience, believe the gospel. I am attempting to show you that all of life has to be lived with the gospel as the very foundation and core of our thinking, reactions, relationships, and priorities. I want you to understand that true justification leads to sanctification. And the means and manner by which we are justified is the pattern for our sanctification. Tonight, I am attempting to demonstrate why that little girl was right, that if you don't believe what God says you have to believe, that he will damn you to hell forever. But, while that is a true statement, it is such a misrepresentation of the person and character of God because it does not present the entire story.

Brothers and sisters, we do not have to be embarrassed about the gospel in anyway. And unlike writer and director of that movie, we do not have to resort to half truths and emotional manipulation. The gospel, rightly understood is the most dazzling, gloriously gripping, heart arresting, and affection raising demonstration of the heart of God ever! The gospel does not begin with us, it begins with God.

John Owen said, **“The revelation made of Christ in the blessed Gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, and more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness, than the whole creation and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can contain or afford. Without the knowledge [of the gospel] hereof, the mind of man, however priding itself in other inventions and discoveries, is wrapped up in darkness and confusion.”**

You cannot understand God apart from the gospel. It is in the gospel that character of God is so clearly set on display. It is not God's delight to damn. It is God's unbridled and infinite joy to save. And God is extremely serious about His joy. When His means of saving is rejected and His Son's life and excruciating death is scorned, then, even though this God delights to be known as Savior, He will be known as Judge.

Please understand this: The gospel begins with God, not us. God is the reference point. The holiness of God is the standard, not the surface comparisons of what we think are our levels of “goodness”. God is the Creator. God is the owner. God is the King. God is the Ruler. God is the standard. God makes the laws. God is Holy. God is infinite. When we sin, we are so in trouble that we cannot begin to fathom the far-reaching consequences and implications of our sin. Adam lived for over 900 years. He lived almost up to the birth of Noah. Adam watched the result of his sin taking place in generation after generation. Sin had to be judged, so the justice of God or the righteousness of God could be re-established.

If a parent says to a child that you need to go to bed at 10 PM, but does not enforce it, then the parents law has not practically been established. It's words only. If, after 6 months of no enforcing, the parent finally comes to his senses and realizes, my word

means nothing around here, he will have to re-establish his word by enforcing the law. God set the standard. His law was violated. We sinned! We broke His law. Does the word of God mean anything to God? Yes! His Word is the expression of his very character. God's Word will not be mocked. His law will not be broken without consequence. God will not allow his word to be trashed. Sin, brings consequences and they are eternally severe because the stakes are so infinitely high because it is God's law that has been broken, not finite man's.

The dilemma is enormous. What are we going to do with all of this sin? Finite man has violated an infinite standard. In order to satisfy the infinite wrath of God that has been triggered by our violating the infinite holiness of God, an infinite atonement, an infinite sacrifice, an infinite payment has to be made so that infinite justice of God is appeased. But how can we do that? What do I have that will fit that requirement? Nothing! We are all running a wee bit short of infinite – aren't we?

We have a compound problem. 1) We don't have anything that hasn't already been contaminated and polluted by sin. No matter what we try to offer to God by way of payment does not pass the quality test because it is all damaged goods. Whatever we give to God in an effort to pay for our sin, will only add to our condemnation because we would be trying to pay off his wrath with counterfeit money. 2) We don't have enough. No matter what we have, it is finite, because we are finite. When we sinned against God, we broke the highest law that we could.

Illustration: If you kill a citizen, you are in trouble. If you kill a cop, a judge, or the president, you are in even bigger trouble. If you sin against God, you are in infinite trouble. You need an infinite solution. Only God could provide the solution.

When a person comes to faith in Christ, that person is saved. But, why does the Bible use that term? What is the person saved from? There is a sense in which they are saved from the penalty of sin and they are being saved from the power of sin and will one day be saved from the presence of God. But in the ultimate sense, we are saved from God. We are saved from the wrath of God. That is the point that Sproul was making when he said, **“The one from whom we need to be saved is the one who has saved us.”**

That is why the gospel is the greatest news you could ever hear. **“Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.”** John Stott. God is the sum total of his attributes. He can never compromise who and what He is. The only way we could be saved was if the righteous wrath of God against our sin was appeased by an infinitely righteous sacrifice. Only God could satisfy His own law. But how could God do that for us? Sin was committed by the human race and therefore the human race had to be one the one to pay for it. Since God was the only one who could satisfy his own law, and since we could obviously not become God, God, the Son, without in anyway ceasing to be what He is, added human nature to His divine nature, and took upon himself the form of His own creation, so that He could live a perfectly righteous life as one of us. This qualified Him as both Priest and offering. He was the Priest who offered up the eternal sacrifice and He was the infinitely righteous sacrifice that was made. No one took

his life; he laid it down of His own free will. This has been the pattern and the picture from the beginning of the Old Testament.

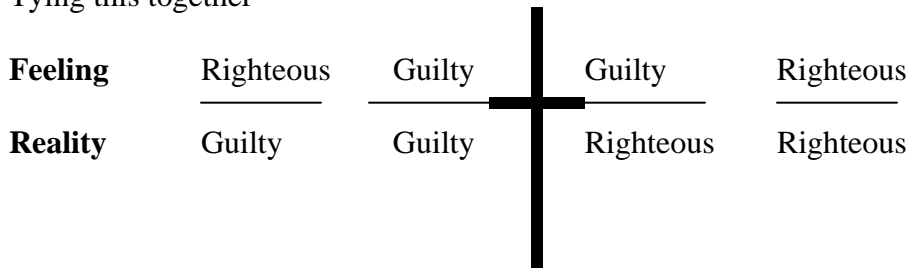
- the animal sacrificed – covering Adam and Eve
- sacrifice as a mediator
- blood on the Mercy Seat

**For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men... 1 Timothy 2.5-6a**

Simply put, there is no other solution. Far from being the God who goes around damning people, we had already damned ourselves by our sin. God is the God who came to earth and lived in our place, and took upon Himself our sorrows, our sins, so he could take upon Himself our punishment, so that He could pour out upon us His grace and mercy and love and forgiveness. What love is this, that I, the guilty should go free? This amazing solution is available to all who will embrace it. But, if it is not received, then those who do not accept it have no eternal hope.

The guilt, that some people live with, is more than a feeling. It is a gift from God as a means to get their attention to deal with the most eternally important issue – ever! If we find a way to medicate our guilt away, we have not taken a step forward; we have taken a colossal step backwards.

Tying this together



Results:

- Peace; Romans 5:1
- No Condemnation; Romans 8:1
- Full Assurance; I John 5:13
- Share It