

Sermon Study

The Laid-back God?

November 15, 2009

Hebrews 10:11-25

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

17 Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Is it just me, or have you also noticed that the average modern person seems to think that God is a pretty laid-back dude? It's impossible not to please this god of modern imagination. He's unflappable and unconcerned; never gets too excited or too engaged; never complains about the way we treat him; never asks much of us and certainly doesn't expect much from us. He is a thoroughly low-maintenance sort of deity. He is "laid-back"

- Many have wondered why we recently switched and required ALL who wish to be members of our church to go through the adult instruction course (even Lutherans). This practice of expecting more upon entering our congregation is based on a number of things that Jesus said, but especially in Luke 14:16-23. Look it up if you wish. How might those who believe in the low-maintenance God frustrate and hinder the work of a Christian congregation? How does it make other church members feel? How does it make God feel?

I did a little research on the history of the term "laid-back" and there are some who believe that it finds its origins in the drug culture of the 60's and 70's. A person would smoke his marijuana, lay back in his chair and benignly smile at the world as it passes by.

So the god of the modern American culture is really like a god on drugs. He'd have to be to no longer care about all the stuff he so clearly said he cares about in his word. He has spoken very strongly against such things as adultery, homosexuality, fornication and premarital sex.

In the past, God said that this kind of stuff kindled his wrath. In the past, he said that behavior such as this was damnable! All sin was damnable according to him actually: from theft, to coveting, to disobeying your parents and other superiors. Damnable.

- You've heard all this before..."God is a god of love and tolerance, therefore he never rejects anyone...he only affirms people." (blah blah blah blah) In other words, God is seen to be like a reassuring mirror. He never challenges us to change or rethink our positions on things. Nope. Amazingly, he always thinks exactly like we do!" How might this totally undermine the reason that we go to church? What sin is this, by the way? (commandment wise) What can you say to someone who believes like this?
- My favorite thing to say is this: "Is God a product of your thought and will? Or are you a product of His thought and will? And if you say that he is a product of your thought and will, can a product of your thought and will truly save you? And if you say he can save you, why don't you use your obviously powerful mind to change other realities in the world and fix things and save us all!" This line of questioning and answering has worked wonderfully for me in the past. It eventually causes them to laugh, but it also short circuits their errant thoughts on God; making it possible for them to actually learn something.

While the moderns think that this has all gone away, the truth is that it hasn't. God doesn't change. Through his prophet Malachi he actually said "I, the Lord, do not change" (Mal. 3:6). So God is really not on drugs as so many in our time apparently imagine. He's not decided to go soft on sin. He has not changed.

You must be wondering how on earth I got on to this rant! What is it that has led me to the point where I thought that I needed to talk about this with you on this morning? It was the reading of Hebrews 10:11-25. It talks about the necessity of sacrifice for sin. As I read and reflected on this, I realized that a large swath of the people of our day would have trouble understanding the greatness of this. They believe that God not only accepts them, but also accepts and tolerates and approves of their sin! This text is all about atonement and they have come to believe that they don't need it! According to the modern way of thinking God is required to love them; required to tolerate them, and should feel lucky to have them. This is precisely why so many who consider themselves to be Christians, rarely if ever go to church. The god they believe in has laid back in a recliner and no longer cares what they do or how they do it.

This text in Hebrews introduces us to the real God. The God who has introduced himself to us in his Word. And this God could not be more different than the god that the moderns have conjured up in their minds. This God does not overlook sin as if it were nothing at all, but rather this God atones for sin at great cost to himself.

From the earliest times, the Lord instructed us with regard to sin. To Adam and Eve he said "The day you eat of it, you will die." Whenever there is sin, there is death. It's as simple as that. Furthermore, the Bible says, "The wages of sin is death". And also "The soul that sins is the one that will die.". Wherever there is sin, there is death. Wherever there is sin, somebody has got to die. God taught the Hebrew people this truth, plus he offered them mercy through sacrifice. As the priests of Old offered sacrifices for the people and they saw the animal die and shed its blood, they understood that the animal's death was in substitution of their own death and that the blood of the animal meant their life.

- Wherever there is sin, someone's gotta die. Ever think that was kind of severe and unfair? Is it simply because God will punish because we made him angry? Have

you ever been privately miffed at God because of this? Have you been miffed at him over the fact that so many are going to die? (responses are optional of course)

- There is a much deeper reason why sin brings death. Think about what sin is! Sin is really the rejection of God's word. Even those who don't know God sin because they act against his law that is written on their hearts and violate their own conscience. So sin, at its root, is the rejection of God's word. Since God used his word to create us, the rejection of his creative word, causes us to become *uncreated*....we lose the life he gave us. We die! So sin is like sawing off the branch of the tree you are sitting on! Sin is like deciding you no longer need air to breathe and insisting you breathe water now. It is that foolish! So there is an element of God's wrath, but there's also an element of doing it to ourselves. You jump off a cliff, you will hit bottom and it's going to hurt. If you sin, You can expect to die. It's kind of like the natural law, you cannot reject the Lord of Life and expect to live.
- I'm really speaking about two deaths here. The first death is physical death....body wearing out and assuming room temperature.... The second death is the eternal death which is hell. Study out the "second death" if you wish by consulting these passages: Rev. 2:11; Rev. 21:8.

The biggest day on the Jewish calendar was the day that the relationship of Israel to God was restored. It was called Yom Kippur, or Day of Atonement." The day started with two sacrifices. One for all the people and one for the high priest. One was to be a goat and the other was to be a bull. Guess which one was sacrificed for Which? Actually the sacrifice of the bull was made for the high priest alone and the goat for all the people.

The priest had to do something so big and so frightful that he needed the blood of the bull to cover him. Sinful as he was, he had to go into the Most Holy place! He would set foot in the place that no other human being was allowed to go. He would walk up the steps of the temple, through the holy place, take a deep breath, and pull back the heavy curtain and walk into the Most Holy Place; where the Lord has caused his glory to dwell; a place where no sin or sinner could possibly survive. He would take the blood from the bowl and sprinkle it on himself and on the floor he would walk. This was the only confidence that they high priest could have: that God would recognize the blood of the bull as payment for his sins and therefore allow him in his presence to do what he had to do. The bull had to die to make the man right with God. The Goat would die to make the people right with God.

Now compare this to a modern person who believes in that laid back God we were talking about. This one would barge into the temple without any preparation whatsoever; talking about his right to do this and his right to do that. He would push himself past the temple guards and up the steps through the Holy Place and then fling wide the curtain expecting a laid back God he shouts "Hey God, I'm Here in all my sinful glory!" "Gotta Love me!" "Gotta Love my sinful behavior too!" But a great sense of dread comes over the modern man as he beholds the most high God who sits between the Cherubim; not slouched or laid-back, but in perfectly attentive posture. He thunders from his throne "I most certainly do not love your sins! They are an insult and and affront to me and all that I am!" Almost immediately, death comes to the modern man. For wherever there is sin, there is death. It's that simple. And this fellow has chosen to approach God without a sacrifice for sin. He was convinced that he didn't need one by all the false propaganda of our age.

- The Propaganda is pretty much an abuse or perversion of the Gospel...the Good news that God saves sinners by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. I get a sense that Satan is trying to assault God and all people with this teaching. He's changed the meaning (in many people's minds) of forgiveness and has twisted it all around into tolerance. The message of this twisted Gospel is that God tolerates sinful people.

It's true he does in that he allows them to live on earth ; hoping they will eventually turn. (Ezekiel 18:23-24---look at it if you want) (See also 5:45) from their wicked ways. Their lives are their chance..and in patience and tolerance he gives it to them. After that, however the tolerance comes to an end. The question of what to do with your sin and your sinfulness becomes the question of the day as the sinner stands before the one who would have been his Savior, but now becomes his Judge. The propaganda of today makes it seem as if this Godly patience and tolerance in the now time will continue in the hereafter. They are sadly mistaken. This is one of the great truths that God reveals to us through this whole temple scene...the requirement of a sacrifice to meet him. A sacrifice is necessary. Someone has to die (both the first and second death) for your sin. Who will it be? Will it be you?

I know what you're think, your thinking that we don't have a sacrifice when we come before God. O, but we do! And that's what makes this Hebrews text so very rich! The whole atonement thing that the priest had to repeat every year was done once and for all by Jesus the great high priest. It was done with the shedding of his blood that was of greater significance than all the blood of beasts. He came to be the punishment for our sins. He came to suffer the wrath of God on our behalf. He came to be our sacrifice and a sacrifice it was. Jesus was beaten and torn apart by whips and fists and crowns of thorns. He was pierced for our transgressions. His blood flowed everywhere! Down his face, Dripping off his arms, out of his sides, on the wood where his bloody back touched.

I know, we've all got a touch of the modern in us. And the mere mention of blood and even the thought of it is somewhat revolting to us. But the temple sacrifices were replete with blood; this final sacrifice that Jesus made was replete with blood too. But don't you get it? HIS blood; not yours! His death; not yours! His suffering of the very pains of hell; not yours! He is our substitute in the judgment of God. He did this willingly for us!

Suddenly the talk of blood is no longer so revolting, but instead, deeply meaningful. It's the sign of his love for us. Like the soldier who throws himself on a live grenade for his platoon, it is gross to contemplate at first, but so jam-packed with love that the grossness is washed away as we look in wonder and appreciation to the one who did this for us.

So no...no..no no no. We do not have a laid-back God who benignly smiles at our sinful behavior through eyes glazed over! We have a completely attentive God who out of love for us and our future paid the ultimate sacrifice. We gave a completely attentive God who has done and is doing all that is needed to save us FROM our sins. AMEN

- So think of some things to say to someone that you know who might have been suckered into this this laid-back God philosophy...which is a false Gospel. Suppose someone says "Well you know, I think God is a loving God and will never send anybody to hell?" It's obvious to you that this is how this person assuages his guilt. What would be some clever ways to respond without getting angry and without making him angry....but just to make him think? (Some hints....How does he know this? How come he seems so serious and definite in his belief of it?)