

## There's Nothing A Good Father Won't Do

1. Warm-up Question: Sunday was Father's Day. Tell us something you admire about your father or someone who has been a father figure to you.
2. At the outset of Sunday's sermon, Jeff told the story of a father, Thomas Vander Woude, who saved his Downs Syndrome son when he fell into a broken septic tank. Thomas submerged himself beneath the water to hoist his son on his shoulders. That kept his son's head above the water, even as the father drowned. Jeff said that's what it's like with us and God. God came to us in the form of Jesus and gave his life so that we might live. Read Isaiah 53:4-8, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Note two key phrases in Isaiah 53. Verse 5 says, "He was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole." Verse 6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray . . . , and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Put those two verses in your own words. What do you hear them saying?
  - b. I Peter 2:24 says, "Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." Put that verse in your own words. What do you hear it saying?
3. Based on verses like the foregoing, we often hear Christians say, "Jesus had to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, so we could be forgiven." That raises an important question. As a skeptic once told Pastor JD Greear, "Why would God need somebody to die in order to forgive our sin? If you sinned against me, and I wanted to forgive you, I wouldn't make you kill your dog before I forgave you. Why would God require some kind of sacrifice to forgive?" Have you ever wrestled with this question before? If so, what troubles you about it?
4. Jeff offered two possible answers to the skeptic's question about why Jesus had to die for us to be forgiven. **Thought #1 – Only a victim has the moral authority to forgive those who victimize. God would not have the moral standing to forgive if God had never become a victim.** Jeff gave an example from the movie "Our Fathers." There, a victim of priestly abuse named Tommy Blanchette told how, years later, he visited the priest who abused him when the priest was dying in the hospital. Tommy confronted him, told how much he hated him, forgave him, and prayed for him to be healed and gain eternal life, leaving his friends dumbfounded.
  - a. Jeff said, "If anybody has the right to pray that kind of prayer of forgiveness, it's someone who has been a victim. If anyone who had not been abused were to say to the priest, 'You are forgiven,' it would have been meaningless and offensive. We who have not been abused have no right to forgive an abuser or tell someone who has been abused that they should forgive the abuser? Only someone who has gone through it has the right to say, 'you are forgiven,' and only if they decide to do so." Your thoughts? Do you agree or disagree – and why?

- b. In your own life, when have you felt most victimized? Suppose someone who had never gone through what you have were to say to you, “You should forgive and forget.” How would that feel?
  - c. Suppose God had never experienced victimization. Suppose God had only lived in the comforts of heaven – almighty, omnipotent, never feeling threatened, never knowing fear, never knowing what it means to be powerless to protect yourself. If God never came to earth and suffered as a victim, would God have the moral authority, in your view, to forgive those who victimize?
5. **Thought #2 (about why Jesus had to die for us to be forgiven) – Justice demands a penalty for sin. If someone victimizes you, then gets off scot free, that’s the very definition of injustice.** Our human sense of justice demands punishment for wrongdoing – an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, life for a life.
- a. In 1964, Medgar Evers (a Mississippi civil rights worker) was gunned down in his driveway by Byron Beckwith (a member of the White Citizen’s Council). Evers died. An all-white jury refused to convict Beckwith. He lived the next 30 years free as a bird. Is that fair? Is that just? Is it ever fair to simply pardon someone who has committed a terrible crime?
  - b. The Bible tells us that God is both merciful and just, but it’s often difficult to reconcile those two holy values. To illustrate the dilemma, Jeff offered a modified example drawn from the legend of King Arthur. Suppose Arthur discovered his wife Guinevere committed murder. On the one hand, Arthur was deeply committed to equal justice under the law and knew that the law required him to impose the death penalty. On the other hand, he couldn’t bear the thought of destroying someone he loved. Arthur has three options: (a) send her to her death; (b) pardon her; or (c) sentence her to death, but then substitute himself, taking the penalty on himself while pardoning her. If you were King Arthur, which option would you choose and why?
  - c. If you were God in the same scenario, responsible for determining someone’s eternal fate, which option would you choose and why?
  - d. Jeff said, “Jesus found a way to forgive while fully honoring and respecting the gravity of the crimes committed against all those who have suffering as victims of sin. Jesus took the just penalty upon himself. My point is not that God needed someone to die. My point is that we did, our human sense of justice did, so Jesus (who treasures both justice and mercy) stepped into that role.” What do you think Jeff meant when he said, “God didn’t need someone to die, we did.” Do you agree? Would it have been better for Jesus to have simply pardoned everyone without taking the penalty for sins on himself? Why or why not?
  - e. Having talked through all of this, where do you come out? In your view, when Jesus died on the cross was he taking upon himself the just penalty for our sins? If so, how do you feel about what Jesus did?

## Isaiah 53:4-8

<sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way,  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>8</sup> By a perversion of justice he was taken away.  
Who could have imagined his future?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people.