

Heart Transplant

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Preacher: Paul Barker

- [0 : 00] Well, let's pray. God, our Father, your word is sweeter than honeycomb.
- It is sweet on our lips. We thank you for the joy that your word gives to us. And we pray that it may bear much fruit in our lives for your glory.
- Amen. For 16 years, they were the sponsors of the Richmond Football Club. But it all ended in 2005.
- It ended because one of the Richmond players, Jay Schultz, was caught drink driving. An idiot.
- Well, a something idiot, if you know what I mean. Because they were the sponsors. The TAC, the Transport Accident Commission, or Corporation, Commission I guess. One wonders about the sanity of the whole project to start with.
- [1 : 20] That if you were the marketing manager of the TAC 16 years before that, did you really think that it would work to advertise don't drink and drive with a football club full of men in their 20s playing football together?
- And there was an article in the paper today that just said the whole culture of football and sporting teams in general and AFL in particular is so riven with things like alcohol, you wonder about the sanity, the sense of TAC sponsoring an AFL football club to start with.
- Back in 2001, there was a previous incident at Richmond and they gave the ultimatum. If another player is caught drink driving, which is of course the very thing that the sponsor is trying to eradicate, then we pull out.
- And so they did in 2005. The TAC had staked its reputation on a bunch of footballers.
- And that sort of demographic and age group within our society of all is probably the most likely to drink and drive and be idiots.
- [2 : 40] Must have been a risky venture to start with. You might wonder if they asked, is our campaign going to be enhanced by sponsoring a football team?
- Well, I'll let you decide that. It's a relatively trivial matter. God staked his reputation on his people.
- A riskier venture. One might say an even more stupid venture. That the almighty God of the universe, the creator of all things, perfect in holiness, would stake his reputation on some people on earth.
- On the descendants of Abraham. An old man who lied, who had wrong sexual relations, who lied again.
- And on his descendants. And the story of those descendants of Abraham is not a particularly encouraging story. God didn't choose the best, it seems.
- [3 : 53] He didn't choose a perfect group of people. They failed. They rebelled. They turned after other gods. They committed bloodshed and murder.
- They were fearful when they shouldn't have been and stupidly bold when they shouldn't have been. A motley group. And God staked his reputation on them.

He made promises to them. He chose them. He said, you're my people. He gave them laws by which to live to reflect the character of God on earth. He redeemed them from slavery.

He provided miraculously for them for a generation in the wilderness. He fought for them. He gave them a land. A good land at that. He enabled them to settle in that land.

And his mission was that he would attract the nations of the world through his reputation staked on his people. That as his people lived under his laws and reflected the holy and beautiful character of almighty God, that the nations of the world would marvel at the God of Israel, would flock to be part of that nation and to be under its God and rules.

[5 : 09] They would wonder that what God is this who's given such righteous laws to his people. They would see the abundant prosperity and blessing that in response to obedient faith, God would pour out on this land.

The rain in its season, the crops and the animals, the fertile valleys. They would see a wealthy and wonderful people. But not just in prosperity, it had its heart, a relationship with God, a relationship grounded in the holy character of God.

That's God's strategy. We might think it's stupid. That he should stake his reputation on such people on earth.

And to a large degree, his strategy failed. After decades and decades of sponsorship, if you like, of Israel, God pulled out.

He'd given them plenty of warnings that he would pull out. And finally he did, as we saw indeed a few weeks ago. The glory of the Lord, representing the holy presence of God in the midst of his people, in the midst of the nation, in the very centrepiece of their temple of Jerusalem, lifts up and moves across the threshold, out of the holy of holies, towards the east and out of the temple courts and away to the east, out of Jerusalem.

[6 : 37] Ezekiel saw that vision in chapters 8 to 11, as we saw a few Sunday nights ago. And God pulled out. He left.

He himself, in effect, went into exile, where this book is addressed. To a people exiled in the 590s BC to Babylon.

To the pagans, the Gentiles who'd surrounded Jerusalem and brought it to its knees and capitulated. The same Babylon who, 10 years later, destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, its walls and buildings.

God had pulled out. And yet, the book of Ezekiel is full of the most wonderful pictures of hope that we can find in the Old Testament.

Tonight's not least, in chapter 36. How can there be hope in the book of Ezekiel? After decades of warnings, after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, after the exile of God himself departing and going off into Babylon and leaving the temple to be ruined, why is there hope?

[7 : 55] Is it just that God is a big softy at heart? No, I think there's a more profound reason that this passage addresses us to tonight.

You see, we often think that God is motivated simply by love. And that because he loves us and he loves Israel, he'll just do anything for them to guarantee their future and their hope.

Now, there's an element of truth in that. But it's certainly not the bottom line. The trouble is that if we end up with a message of hope or a message of the gospel that is simply God motivated and driven by being loving, we actually collapse the gospel to a significant degree.

Because God loves us so much, he'll never give up on us. Israel could have thought that, as often we do. We see it reflected sometimes in our songs and hymns.

Now, I know I had a little dig at some modern songs last week. Let me dig at another one tonight. This is a song that I actually really love, except for these two lines, which I think are atrocious.

[9 : 07] Like a rose trampled on the ground, you took the fall and thought of me above all. It's atrocious metaphor because I'm not aware that roses rise and think of anything.

They're inanimate. It's a stupid analogy, let me say. But it's a terrible theology. It's speaking of Jesus on the cross, as though he dies and the thing above anything in his head is you or me.

Now, I know that he died in part because of the love of God and the love of Jesus for this fallen world. But it's not the primary motivation. And that's what this passage is directing us to tonight.

Often as I sing that song, I try to think, how can I rewrite these two words so that I can preserve a song that I quite like but keep and have two alternative lines in it? Ezekiel 36 is a profound passage.

It's a correction to that sort of me-centred gospel, that God loves me so much he'll never abandon me. And whilst, as I say, there's some truth in that, it's far from the bottom line.

[10 : 24] This passage directs us profoundly, I think, to understand the primary motivation of God in this world and in this universe. To direct us also to the integrity of God in bringing that about.

But sometimes we feel that there's some clash between the love of God and the holiness of God, that judgment and love are somehow in competition and somehow we just simply trust that God's love will prevail.

But actually there's a deep integrity to the character of God. He's never playing off one attribute against another. He's judgment against love. And we'll see the bottom line that holds that together tonight.

This is a profound chapter. Because it will influence the way we think about God. The way we respond to...