

Sermon Notes 2023

Kian Hwee

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Foreword

Herein contains my summary of the sermons for 2023. These sermons notes are mostly typed out during the sermon as the pastor preaches. Sometimes I will add in some of my own clarifications/notes/thoughts to the points given by the pastors, hence one can safely assume that any theological errors found herein are to be attributed to me, not the pastors.

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1st January 2023: The True Way Misison statement - Establishing and Equipping

Text: Ephesians 4:7-16

[7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. [8] Therefore it says,

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

[9] (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Notes

- In Ephesians 2, there is the imagery of Christ as the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets as the foundation, and then we are built up on the prophets and the apostles. In our text, a similar thing happens, but now the imagery is that of a human body, made up of many parts but working together, and all these parts are built up in love and grow due to Christ giving the church apostles and teachers and prophets and evangelists.
- True way has a mission statement and a vision statement. The vision statement is what our church aspires to be, and the mission statement is what our church wants to do everyday to achieve that vision statement. The mission statement is that: compelled by the love of God, we engage the community, evangelise the lost, establish the faith of the saints, and equip the saints to do mission work.
- Firstly, let's talk about the motivation aspect in our mission statement, the "love of God that compels us". Here "love of God" can mean two things, either God's love for us or our love of God. For the former, we have 1 John 4:9 as an example. And for the latter, we have 1 John 2:4-5 as an example. The latter is also an echo to the great commandment. How are the former and latter connected? The former leads to the latter; we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). God loving us is the starting point to us loving God. This motivation is important; if the task is too difficult, the sacrifice too great, it is this motivation that keeps us going.
- Next, let's talk about the "mission" aspect of our mission statement. The rest of our mission statement is just an elaboration of the great commission (Matt 28:18-20). In the great commission text, we have the "going", the "make disciples", the "baptising" and the "teaching". The first two words above are related to the "engage and evangelise" part of our mission, and the next two words are related to "establish and equip" part of our mission.
- Lastly, let's talk about the means that are given to us to carry out the mission. The key here is Eph 4:7. As the Father sends the Spirit through the Son to us (in the economy of salvation),

the Spirit gives us all individual gifts that we use to build up the body of Christ, to build each other up in love.

- The method by which the body of Christ is built up is that God gives the Church prophets and the apostles, which are the foundation of the Church. Then God also gives the Church evangelists and pastors and teachers which build upon this foundation of the church, who preach and teach the rest of the saints to **equip** the saints.
- But what are the rest of the saints equipped to do? They are equipped to do the work of ministry. So it is not that all the work that God wants us to do is done by the evangelists and pastors, the majority of God's work is actually done by the rest of the saints! The pastors and evangelists are just the ones that equip the rest of the saints. It is as if the pastors and evangelists are just the blacksmiths and the war academy, but the actual army is the rest of the saints. But of course, we don't discount the work of the pastors and the teachers and the evangelists. These teaching ministries help us to be mature in Christ, which help us to discern truth from heresy for example, and ultimately help us to **speak the truth in love to one another**, which helps us to build up the body of Christ (the establishing and equipping part of our mission).
- Examples: after the sermon by the pastors, we (the congregation) can share with each other a lesson from the sermon. This is the best example of how the pastor equips us to build up the church. We can also listen to each other's conversion story, we can also pray for each other, we can also share how God has been working in our lives. If we are in a DG, we can prepare for the BS and participate. We can also remind each other, to rebuke each other in love. We can also serve one another using the gifts God has given us, we can welcome each other and love each other.
- We should not come to church expecting to be served, with a consumer mindset. That leads to much complaining. But we should come to church as builders, as establishers, so we will want to solve problems in Church when they arise (which they will)!
- Conclusion: motivation → mission → means → method. And what is the goal? The goal is in v13-15 of our text, and basically it is to make more people members of the Church and make each member of the Church more like Jesus.

8th January 2023: The True Way Misison statement - Engaging and Evangelising

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:10-21

[10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

[11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. [12] We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. [13] For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. [14] For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

[16] From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Notes

- As per last week, we are equipped by the pastors and the teachers to do the work of ministry. And part of the work of ministry is the *ministry of reconciliation*, which is the key theme in today's text (the word reconciliation appears like 5 times).
- The purpose of engaging and evangelising those who are not Christians yet is so that we can help them be reconciled with God.
- In this ministry of reconciliation, the **message** of reconciliation is key. And the key message is found in v21 of our text, which can be paraphrased as: "For God made CHrist, who never sinned, to be the offering for oursin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ". The ministry of reconciliation implies that that is something that needs reconciliation, and that something is sin; because of the Fall, all of us are born with sinful human natures and are by nature enemies of God, unless God reconciles us to himself. And God has extended this offer of reconciliation through the death of His Son for our sins.
- After we have been reconciled, we have a new **master**. In the past while we were sinners, we lived for ourselves. We were our own master. Now, God is our master, and we are to live for Christ rather than for ourselves. If our Master then has given us the ministry of reconciliation, shouldn't we take this task seriously? This ministry of reconciliation is difficult. We will be rejected, and we will get hurt. But we must still do it. When Jesus was on earth, He was similarly rejected by those He was sent to; we should similarly expect rejection.

- What compels us to live for Christ rather than for ourselves? What is our **motivation** for doing this ministry of reconciliation despite how difficult it is? The motivation is the love of Christ! In fact, when we love Jesus, we will be motivated to love other people too. And the best way to love another person is to tell the person about the message of Jesus. This is the primary motivation.
- Another secondary motivation though is that at the end of our lives, we all have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This judgment is not for our salvation, but to determine our reward. In short, the secondary motivation here is the fear of the Lord. Of course, this secondary motivation is related to the primary motivation; the fear of the Lord is related to the love of the Lord!
- As ambassadors of Christ, we are like high ranking diplomats sent to a foreign country. We are in the world but not of the world; as diplomats, our citizenship is in the Kingdom of heaven. Hence, as ambassadors of the Kingdom of heaven, we are to live our Kingdom values, to make the Kingdom of God an attractive place to others.
- Now, being an ambassador means that the model of ministry is “incarnational”. Just like how diplomats are more useful if they go out of the embassy and talk to others, we are more useful if we go out into the world to live among the world and serve them. Our service is part of how we *engage* the lost, and this engagement is the stepping stone to *evangelism*.
- In True Way, we have organised ministries like the Tuition ministry, the Ukelele ministry, etc. These are opportunities for us to engage and evangelise. But apart from these organised ministries, we can also be ambassadors wherever God places us in our lives. We should always be praying for and on the lookout for opportunities for spiritual conversations with whoever God brings into our lives. We can have these spiritual conversations in an impromptu manner with whoever crosses our paths, but we should also have these spiritual conversations in a more intentional manner. Being intentional would mean things like having a list of people that we want to engage, and then constantly reaching out to them in an intentional manner.
- Closing remarks:
 - What if people are not interested? Ans: continue to be their friend! Don't make them feel like you have an ulterior motive, that you only want to share the gospel with them. Let us be genuinely interested in our lives and let us love them truly.
 - What if we don't feel adequate? For example, what if we feel that we are not good at explaining the gospel, or what if we feel that we don't know how to direct the conversations to spiritual conversations? Ans: this is where the “equipping and establishing” comes in. There are programmes in church that equip us to do stuff. Or in a less formal setting, we can ask other more experienced Christians to help us!
 - What if we don't see any results? Ans: don't measure our results by how many people we bring to Christ, but measure our results by how much we can **show** and **share**. As long as we are effective in **showing** the gospel through how we live, and as long as we are effective in **sharing** the gospel through the conversations that we have, we can consider ourselves to have had good results.

15th Jan 2023: True Way Vision statement

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

[14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Notes

- The understanding of TWPC is this: if we are faithful in our mission, we will be able to reach our mark, i.e to achieve our vision. Church's new vision statement: to be like Jesus, by the power of His Spirit, for the glory of God.
- To be like Jesus means to be like Jesus in His being (His character) and in His actions. For the former, our text says that the church is to be rooted and grounded in love. To be rooted and grounded in love implies that we will be growing in love (a plant is rooted and grounded to grow). Growing in love makes us more like Jesus, since God is love.
- How to grow in love? Through service!
 1. The one being served experiences God's love.
 2. The one who is serving experiences God's love.
 3. The one who is serving while being stretched grows in love. Serving is hard, and we can only serve by depending on the Spirit. So when we serve more, we depend more on the Spirit and we grow in love.
 4. Lastly, we can all share how we have experienced God's love. That's why the text says that when we understand God's love, we have to do so with "all the saints". Understanding God's love is a group effort.
- The end goal in this text is this: "to be filled with all the fullness of God"
- To be like Jesus also means to grow to be like Jesus in his doing. Tangibly, this looks like: When we carry out the mission of pursuing the 4Es (John 20:21, Matthew 28:19).
- We are not doing all the above alone though, we are doing the above by the power of His Spirit. Jesus Christ is in our midst, as per Matthew 28:20. Jesus dwells with us through the person of the Spirit in us. Jesus is also with the church, Rev. 2:1. From our text, we see this concept of the Spirit helping us through verses like v16 and v20.
- Prayer is what helps us to rely on the Spirit working through us.
- Fell asleep from here onwards...had too little sleep the previous night...

22nd Jan 2023: The worship of the creator

Text:

[1] After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." [2] At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. [3] And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. [4] Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. [5] From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, [6] and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: [7] the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. [8] And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"

[9] And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, [10] the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

[11] "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

Notes

- Chapter 4 opens with "after this", hence we know chapter 4 marks a new point in the book of Revelation. Also, there is a change in setting; chapters 1-3 have the setting of the island of Patmos. Now in chapter 4, John is "spirited away" into the heavenly throne room. John is seeing a vision of God's heavenly throne room generated by the Holy Spirit.
- Chapters 4-5 are meant to be one unit, and they are the basis of what happens in the rest of the book (much like how the vision of the Son of Man is the basis of chapters 1-3).
- Chapter 4 is purely descriptive. So, what does this text tell its readers? Instead of trying to tell us something, chapter 4 is trying to show us something. And what chapter 4 is showing us evokes a certain response from us. Chapter 4 shows us the glory of God in display, so that we can respond in true worship. The Christians of John's day need to see God's glory, because they were either under persecution or being tempted by the lures of the world. They need to be reminded that God is worthy of worship and hence they should persevere in their faith despite persecution or temptations.
- For us, our world today is highly volatile. Many things can change very quickly. An example was the covid-19 pandemic. This leads to us having fear and anxiety, because despite our best attempts to control our future, we can't. For us, we need a vision of God that is majestic so as to remind us that God is in control and that we can continue trusting in God. The glorious

vision of God in chapter 4 compels us to worship God and hence trust God with our future, since true worship leads to trust.

- John's description in chapter 4 is less like a photograph of heaven, and more like a surrealist painting of heaven. I.e, it is not literal. We know this is not literal because John describes God the Father as a human figure sitting on the throne, but theologically, we know God is Spirit. If we try to take John's description literally, instead of trying to see what the description points to, we will be missing the point.
- The images that John describes in chapter 4 are very familiar to his first century Christian audience (intertextuality!).
 - First of all, John sees only one mega throne. What this is trying to say is that there is only one God, something that harks back to the shema.
 - Next of all, John sees the throne made of jasper and carnelian, both precious stones. These stones emphasise that God is glorious.
 - Next of all, John sees a rainbow that has the appearance of emerald. The rainbow could be a reference to the Noahic covenant, or it could be just something that elaborates that God is glorious. The reference to the Noahic covenant could be a reference to how in the later chapters, God will judge the earth yet preserve it through judgment.
 - Next of all, John sees the sea of glass, and lightning and thunder that issued from the throne. The lightning and thunder that issues forth from the throne reminds the readers of the Exodus, and it brings across the awesomeness and fearsomeness of God. While we might find lightning and thunder frightful, they are under God's control.
 - The seven torches around the throne refer to the seven spirits of God, and this is the same imagery that is found in Zechariah 4. Hence, the seven spirit of God refer to the sevenfold Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit (the number seven is just used to symbolise completeness).
 - The four living creatures are almost the same as those in Ezekiel. Possibly, the lion represents the greatest wild animal, the ox represents the greatest domesticated animal, the human represents man, and the eagle represents the greatest flying animal. Hence, this shows us that since even the greatest living creatures are made to continually praise God, hence all living creatures are to continually praise God. Nature is suffused with God's glory, and reflect God's glory. The marvellous aspect of nature in John's description are fitting to describe the glory of God.
 - Forming an outer ring around the mega throne are 24 elders around the throne. This is a re-enactment of an ancient court. In the gospel, Jesus said that Christians are the ones who would be given white robes, crowns, and will be seated on thrones. Hence, the 24 elders could be a reference to the people of God. And the number 24 is because the number 12 has always been used to refer to God's people. We have $24 = 12 + 12$, and the first 12 is a reference to the OT saints (12 tribes), and the other 12 is a reference to the NT saints (12 apostles). The 24 elders continually affirm that God is the one who creates everything and sustains everything, and hence God has control over the all creation.
- Now, to focus on the last point above, we note that we do not worship sheer power. Sheer power is not worthy of worship. Hitler was a powerful man, but people wouldn't spontaneously worship him. Hitler could only coerce people to worship him. In our text, we see the 24 elders spontaneously worshipping God. This means that there must be something apart from sheer power in God that is worthy to worship, and that something else would be

His goodness (see also chapter 5). From this chapter itself, we also see that God's goodness is displayed through His act of creation. God does not need to create; He exists as a triune community of love with His Son and His Spirit. Creation is not necessary to God, yet God created out of love so that we can enjoy the good creation that He created and so we can enjoy His goodness.

- Hence, our posture as Christians today must be the same as the 24 elders, we must worship God with true worship. And trust is necessary to true worship of God; hence despite all the anxiety and chaos of daily life, we must trust God instead of ourselves.
- Now, with all that has been said about the goodness of creation, we see that right now, the world is not as perfect as it should have been. That is the source of anxiety and chaos that we see in our lives. This is not because God is absent, but this is because of human sin (the fall). John's vision shows us that what we see today, raging seas and crashing waves, is not what things should be, or what things will be (compare raging seas with crystalline, still sea). In the new creation, all the chaos will come to an end, and we can truly see creation as the reflection of God's glory, as it should be.

29th January 2022: The Redeeming Lamb

Text: Revelation 5

[1] Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. [2] And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" [3] And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, [4] and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [5] And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

[6] And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. [9] And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

[11] Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, [12] saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

[13] And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

[14] And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Notes

- Three points for today: disappointment, solution, and response.
- Verse 4 tells us at the start, there was a scroll that was sealed completely (7 seals, 7 is the number of perfection). Unfortunately, nothing in creation (in heaven, on earth or under the earth) could open the scroll. This scroll was important because it contained God's plan of salvation and judgment. If nobody could open the scroll, then the plan of salvation and judgment could not be carried out. Hence, the weeping.
- We live in a world that is VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous). We face many disappointments in life, from people, from unanswered prayers, etc. And that is because of sin and the fall of Man. Verse 4 tells us that creation cannot save itself. This means that

when we look to someone or something for hope, we can't look to someone or something in creation for hope. We must look outside.

- Verses 5-9 give us the solution to the problem in v4. An elder told John that \exists (there exists) someone who can break the seals and open the scroll, and that someone was the Lion from the tribe of Judah (c.f Gen 49:9-10), from the root of Jesse. Obviously, this someone was the long-promised messiah.
- But shockingly, when John turned around, he saw a lamb instead! The expectation of the Lion of Judah that was to come was fulfilled by the Lamb of God. Lion represents an animal that is strong, and Lamb represents an animal that is meek. A few questions that comes to mind:
 1. Who is the Slain Lamb? (Jesus as the fulfilment of the passover Lamb).
 2. Why is He worthy to open the scroll and the seals? (He has made all of us sinners a people for God through His blood. He has already triumphed over evil by taking on the world's evil on himself, dying and resurrecting.)
 3. How did He conquer? (Not with might and strength like the rulers of the world, but with the sacrificial meekness of a Lamb. This is mind-blowing! This Lamb is actually very powerful, with seven horns. This Lamb is also all knowing, with seven eyes. This Lamb is very powerful, but He wins the victory through His sacrificial death and through His resurrection.)
 4. What does it mean for us today? (We are redeemed to be witnesses of Christ, to live like Christ. This means that for us Christians today, the way we win is the same way Christ wins; we win not by strength, military or political, but we win by self-sacrificial meekness that touches the hearts of others.)
- Also, Christ has redeemed people from every tribe and nation and tongue and tribe. This means that God, from the start, desires a multi-cultural body of Christ. There is unity in diversity, rather than uniformity. True worship focuses on something more important than ourselves, it is focused on Christ. All races stand in need of a saviour, and all races have the same savior. The savior is what unites us.
- Our savior Jesus died for our sins but He rose again, and He will come again to reign. When we follow Jesus' example, we don't need to be afraid of dying. For like Jesus, it is through death that we overcome, and like Jesus, God will raise us up to reign with Jesus through His Holy Spirit.
- Verses 8-14 is the response of all creation. They sang a new song, just like Psalm 98. When we know the magnitude of what Christ has done for us, and when we know that Christ can do what He was done only because of His worthiness, we will naturally worship and celebrate. The worship of the Lamb here in chapter 5 is the same as the worship of the one on the throne in chapter 4. Just like how the figure on the throne in chapter 4 is in the middle of all things, the Lamb is also in the middle of all things. Hence, Jesus, like the Father, is central to all creation. Hence, all creation's appropriate response to God is worship. The ultimate destiny of Mankind can only either be to join the eternal worship chorus, or to rebel against God.
- This vision of the throne room in chapters 4 and 5 is meant to give the seven churches a sight of the true spiritual realities.
 1. For churches like Smyrna and Philadelphia who are persecuted, this vision reminds them that Rome is not the centre of creation, but God is. Only God is worthy, and God has the power to destroy evil. Hence, this would encourage the Christians there to

continue holding on to their faith in the midst of suffering, because one day, their faith in God who is worthy will be vindicated.

2. For churches like Laodicea and Sardis, this vision reminds them that they must repent and turn back to God, because only God is worthy. If not, one day, they will be destroyed when the Lamb opens the scroll.