

In this series, we have been exploring the emotions of God. God is a living being, who has more emotions than we can imagine. At creation, God breathed His Spirit into us, by which we understand, God did not stop short of pouring into us, all that He is! We are created in God's image, we have in us, all that God is.

We have explored God's emotion of being Father, inviting us to belong to His family; we have explored how we alienate God from our daily lives, isolating Him into loneliness; we explored God who grieves when we do not use and benefit from the resources He has put at our disposal; and last Sunday we explored God, in whom is ONLY love, an emotion from which we cannot be separated.

Perhaps the most difficult emotion I have had to explore, is the God who dies. "Death" is particularly poignant this morning, having laid Matthew Nellor to rest on Thursday, and the day before, Mum phoned to say, her only brother had died, after an operation removing several blood clots from his brain.

**Death** is a word we use rather carelessly. We might say to a child or a person who inundates us questions, *You will be the death of me with all your questions*. In this winter season, we might caution someone of *catching their death from the cold*. When we have explored every possible avenue of doing something, we might say, *This matter has been done to death*.

We are taught to use language to express ourselves. A teacher in school, a parent might have instructed us to "Speak clearly", so we choose words to

communicate, hoping others will understand as clearly, the thoughts that are clear in our own minds.

On 8th April, 1966 TIME magazine carried a black front cover with three words in bold red, **Is God Dead?** A movement called the "*Death of God*", which is mistakenly referred to as a "Christian Theological Movement", was taking root. People associated with this movement talk about God who spent so much energy at creation, died a natural death; others like Richard Rubenstein, refer to God who died in Auschwitz.

Several in this movement refer to God who stopped being Father God when He came as His Son, and then His Son died on the cross, and now the Holy Spirit is with us! God is dead they say, as is His son Jesus. These people have obviously not read the **whole** of Scripture, or have chosen to read it selectively.

We have just sung a favourite hymn, "And can it be, that I should gain, An int'rest in the Saviour's blood? **Died He for me**, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! how can it be, That Thou, **my God**, should'st die for me?"

The phrase, *The Death of God*, and the words of the hymn we have just sung, beg the question, "Can God die?" Is it possible for God to die?

When God created the world we live in, everything He created, had life; When God said, *Let there be light*, light sustained life; the air had life to sustain the life of birds, the water of the sea and lakes and rivers had life to sustain life of fish, the land had life to support the life of plants and

animals. Nothing God created was intended to die; life, therefore, was eternal! Until disobedience sets in motion, the process of death, which is introduced by the person who destroys life - satan himself.

There is a wonderful section in the account of the life of Job, when he replies to one of his so-called friends who suggested that his big-time suffering was the result of big-time sin. Job replies, *Ask the animals, and they will teach you [that God does not deal with His creatures according to their character]; ask the birds of the air, and they will tell you; Or speak to the earth [with its other forms of life], and it will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare [this truth] to you. Who [is so blind as] not to recognise in all these, that it is God's hand which does it [and God's way]? For in His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.*<sup>1</sup>

This truth is echoed right through human history. Thousands of years later, Paul introduces the living God to the people of Athens with the same thought, *for in Him (God) we live and move, and have our being*<sup>2</sup>.

Last Sunday we discovered *God in whom is ONLY love*, today we uncover *God in whom is ONLY life*; there is no death in God.

So where does death exist? Death exists, where God doesn't; death exists in the absence of God. Where God is dishonoured, discredited, shamed and humiliated, where God is ignored and shunted out, death exists.

We know the story of Daniel, the one who was thrown into the den of hungry lions and came out unscathed and alive the next morning. Daniel

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<sup>1</sup> Job 12:7-10

<sup>2</sup> Acts 17:28

turned up in Babylon because King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and brought back to Babylon, a large population of the Jewish people as exiles. His son King Belshazzar throws a lavish party and orders the gold and silver goblets taken as plunder from the Temple in Jerusalem, be brought out and used to serve wine to his guests. These are items dedicated to the service of God in the Temple at Jerusalem, but at this celebration, the king not only uses these sacred objects dedicated to God, but uses them to raise a toast to the idols of Babylon! Daniel informs the King, *You did not honour God who holds in His hand, your life and all your ways*<sup>3</sup>. That very night, the King was assassinated! Not only does death exist in the absence of God, but death enters in where God is dishonoured. I could tell you of several similar events, during my lifetime.

But the question before us is, **Does God die?**

Very simply, the answer is **NO** because life and death cannot co-exist in God.

So what happened on the cross? Why do we sing, *Died He for me, .... Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, should'st die for me?*

We learn that death entered this creation as a result of our rejection of God. In some way or the other, all of us reject God; it may not be through wilful disobedience, it can be when we do not stand up, or speak up for what we know is right before God, not right in our sight, by **our** standards of morality, but by God's standards. We also reject God when we allow

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel 5:23 (end)

anger, jealousy, short-temperedness, perhaps even hatred, intolerance, oneupmanship, to control us.

We know that Jesus never rejected God. He always acted in obedience to God's will and plan, to leave Heaven, be born and live on earth as a human being, and to die on the cross, the most horrible death ever devised by human beings. If Jesus honoured God in everything He did, why did He have to die?

The youngest of the twelve disciples, Mark offers a clue, *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve — and to give his life as a ransom for many*<sup>4</sup>.

Jesus did not die for the sake of what He had done; Jesus died on our behalf for all the times we have rejected God. Jesus died our death. When we say, Jesus *sacrificed* His life for us, this is what it means.

Make no mistake: Jesus was not a martyr! He was was not a good and honourable man, dying in a publicly memorable manner, as nobly as possible.

Jesus comes to die, to break the hold of death over us, that we may no longer remain separated from God.

When Jesus died, God experienced the pain of death, but God did not die! If God died, the whole of the universe, all of creation would have collapsed. God experienced the pain of death, **at the crucifixion of Jesus,**

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 10:45

but this is short-lived; the joy of the resurrection of Christ, when Jesus defeats the power of death over us, joy overwhelms God!

I love the detail in Luke's account of the empty tomb, when early on Sunday morning, several women arrived at the burial tomb to complete what could not be done for 24 hours because of Sabbath regulations. There they met two men in clothes that gleamed like lightening, who said to the women, *Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen!*<sup>5</sup> The excitement of Heaven, the overflowing joy in God's heart is expressed in those words, *He is not here, He is risen!*

The next time we sing "...**Died He** (*my Saviour*) **for me**, ... Amazing love! how can it be, That Thou, **my God**, should'st die for me?", lets remind ourselves, God experienced the pain of death when Jesus died on the cross, but God does not die.

When God is stripped of Fatherhood (belonging), consigned to loneliness, when God grieves because we do not live up to the potential He has given us, and God's love is spurned because we don't know what it is and we don't know how to live with it, God experiences the pain of death.

It is not the death we know; death for God it is the sorrow we do not know.

Which leaves us with the question, *How do I respond to someone who takes on Himself, the punishment due to me, especially when that punishment is death?* **AMEN.**

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:4-6