WEEK 7 Chapter Seven

God Is Self-Sacrificing

The cross is not God taking it out on Jesus. It is God absorbing what we hand over.

The God Narrative Challenge

The narrative we have been handed	**The narrative Jesus tells**
God is fundamentally a judge whose anger had to be satisfied before God could love us. Someone had to pay, and Jesus stepped in front of the blow that was meant for me. Underneath this story, God is dangerous and Jesus is the one protecting me from God.	*In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. Not through a third party, not by punishing a substitute, but by entering the violence and refusing to return it. God does not demand the sacrifice. God makes it, and then says, let this same mind be in you.*

The challenge this week: This week, sit with the difference between "God demanded a sacrifice" and "God made one," and notice which of those two Gods you actually pray to.

Quotes for Reflection

"He became what we are that he might make us what he is."

– Athanasius, On the Incarnation

"Only a suffering God can help."

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

"And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

– Charles Wesley, 1738

Scripture for the Week

Read: Philippians 2:5–11, 2 Corinthians 5:19, and Luke 23:34

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

2 Corinthians 5:19

Read Paul's sentence slowly, because the preposition carries the whole argument. He does not say God was reconciling the world through Christ, as though Christ were a third party brought in to absorb a blow. He says God was in Christ. Whatever is happening on that cross is happening to God and by God, not to God's stand-in. The hymn Paul quotes to the Philippians, which the church was almost certainly singing before Paul ever wrote it down, describes a God who does not consider equality with God something to be grasped or clutched. The direction of divine movement in that hymn is always downward: emptying, descending, taking the form of a servant. None of this makes the cross cost less. It makes the cost God's own. And it changes what we are being invited into, because Paul introduces the whole thing by saying let the same mind be in you, which means the self-giving is not only something to admire from a distance. It is something we are being handed.

Questions for Conversation

1. What picture of the cross were you handed as a child? Does it still hold up?

2. Is there a real difference between “God demanded a sacrifice” and “God made one”? Does the difference matter to how you pray?

3. Where have you watched someone absorb harm rather than pass it along? What did it cost them?

4. What would it look like for you to have this mind in you this week, in one specific relationship?

THE PRACTICE THIS WEEK: Reading the Gospel of John

We tend to read the Gospels in fragments, a few verses at a time, and we lose the shape of the whole. Reading John straight through in a week is not a study assignment. It is a way of spending enough consecutive time with Jesus that you begin to recognize how he moves.

- Twenty-one chapters, three a day for seven days. Sunday through Saturday.
- Read for acquaintance, not analysis. You are not preparing to teach it.
- Underline nothing about doctrine. Underline what Jesus does, especially the small things.
- If you fall behind, do not double up out of guilt. Just pick up where you are.
- Keep a single sheet of paper for anything that surprises you.

Bring one thing you had never noticed before, however small.

Notes and What I Noticed

Bring back one honest sentence. Not a report card. Just the truth.