

Sermon for Sunday, June 27, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"GOD AND THE GUY IN THE BLACK HAT"

Romans 5:1-11

Text: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

One of my favorite stories is about the Irishman who was making his confession to his Roman Catholic priest and confessed that the night before he had stolen some hay from his neighbor. In order to make the punishment fit the crime, the priest inquired as to how much hay the Irishman had stolen. "Well, Father," replied the thief, "I might as well confess to the whole stack since I'm going back after the other half tonight." In a real sense this determined Irishman is typical of us all. No matter how much we confess our sins and grieve over them, sin still remains. In the western movies I used to see as a child, the hero always wore a white hat and the bad guys wore black hats. One of our major automotive producers picked this idea up in their advertising and tried to convince the whole country that their dealers wear white hats. But as St. Paul once put it, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." And that means that the guy in the black hat is you--and it is I.

In our scripture for this morning St. Paul tells us that we all wear black hats, he tells us that we are all sinners. Now, I don't suppose anyone likes being called a sinner. If someone walked up to you and said, "Listen, I happen to know you are a sinner," we would not react very well. General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was once preaching a sermon in which he was portraying the dilemma of a man on the Judgment Day who had seduced a young woman. In his electric voice he described the scene with mounting intensity, "Here she comes--the woman he seduced! Her golden hair is falling over her shoulders--she is screaming, 'That is the man! That is the man!'" Suddenly, to the horror of all, a voice from the balcony cried out in torment, "My God--he means me!" Then, with an appalling crash, he leaped over the balcony rail to the floor below. Miraculously unhurt, he stumbled up the aisle to fall at the altar in repentance. But the fact is, few of us like to believe we wear black hats. We like to think of ourselves in complimentary terms. We have a convenient psychological device that balances our good and bad traits and makes things always turn out in our favor. We don't drink to excess or gamble for more than we can afford to lose. We are active in community activities, attend church with some regularity, and support its work with our money. All in all, we are responsible citizens who are concerned about poverty, human needs, and the war in Vietnam. So, don't tell us we wear black hats!

However, this morning I would like to distinguish between sins and Sin with a capital "S". In verse ten of our scripture we get a clue to the meaning of Sin. St. Paul writes, "For if while we're enemies...to God..." Yes, enemies to God--that is Sin with a capital "S"--that is Sin that has to do with what we are. Sins with the "s" in the lower case are the things we do that are bad. But Sin is a state of being--it is wearing a black hat--it is being an enemy to God.

Had you ever thought of yourself that way--as an enemy to God? That's shocking language isn't it? Yet, that is precisely what St. Paul says, that we are enemies to God. The word "enemy" is the same word used when a state of war exists, when diplomatic relationships are broken, when a no-man's land exists and there is no communication between foes. To be in a state of Sin is to be an enemy with God--it means that our relationship to him is broken.

Now, you might react to what I have said something like this: "Well, Andy, I'm not mad at God. I'm not at war with God. I don't hate him and I don't think of

him as my enemy." But let me ask you this: Do you have a perfect relationship to God? Do you walk in perfect obedience and perfect harmony with his will for your life? Do you live the kind of life and do the kind of things that is exactly what God desires of you? Well, if you cannot say "yes" to that, then you wear a black hat--your relationship to God is imperfect and you are indeed an enemy to God, you are in rebellion against God and his perfect will for your life.

Do you remember what the Bible records John the Baptist as saying when he saw Jesus approaching? He cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Notice that the word "sin" is singular. Jesus didn't so much come to die for the many, many sins we commit. No, he came primarily to deal with something far more basic and far more serious. He came to deal with men who live in a state of war. He came to deal with men in rebellion, whose relationship to God is broken.

Another illustration of the meaning of the word "sin" is found in Jesus himself. The Bible tells us that he was without sin. Do you think this refers to the fact that he did not do this thing or that thing? Well, that is certainly a part of it, but the thing that makes Jesus without sin is the fact that he had a perfect fellowship with God. He alone of all men could say, "I and the Father are one."

So then, if you cannot say this morning that you have perfect fellowship with God--if you cannot say that you and the Father are one, then you wear a black hat--you are an enemy to God. But you are not alone! (if that is any comfort!) Outside of Jesus, I suppose St. Paul was the greatest Saint that ever lived. Yet, it was this same Paul who confessed that he wore a black hat. He wrote, "I am the chief of sinners." Again he wrote, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." He could have written, "I find that when I start to put on my white hat, I am already wearing my black one."

Has this been your experience? Haven't you really--deep down in your heart--wanted to do good? What would you give this morning to have perfect fellowship with God? It would be worth a lot, wouldn't it?.....were you thinking, "Yes, it would be worth a lot?" Well, what would you give this morning to pay for your sins? Would you be willing to pay as much per year as you do on your income tax to insure eternal salvation? What would you give in exchange for your soul--would you give your home, your possessions? Just how much would you give? Yet, the fact is, if you gave all you had it wouldn't be enough. You wear a black hat--you are an enemy to God--you don't have enough to pay him for your sin.

Well, if you are an enemy to God and if you can't pay for your sin, you are in bad shape. May be you are thinking, "Well, if that is the case, I'm lost. I can't earn salvation." Now, if you said that, you are exactly right! There isn't anything you can do to wipe out your sins and to get rid of the rebellion in your heart against God. There isn't a single thing you can do to clear your record and give yourself a fresh start. I have people say to me, "Well, I would join the church, but I know I'm not good enough. I'm not what I ought to be. One of these days I'm going to do better. I'm going to start living right and then when I can do my part, I'm going to join the church." Let me assure you that anybody who is waiting this morning to do something on his own to get right with God is going to be waiting an awfully long time. He is going to find out that his black hat is stuck to his head!

What would life be like if we had to drop the matter there on that hopeless, helpless note? Life would hardly be worth living if we knew it would ultimately end in a wreck, in total disaster. That's why the story of the New Testament has been called, "good news." It is good news for men who wear black hats, who are in despair. It is good news for men who are lost. It is good news for men who are hopeless and helpless.

And what is the good news? It is the good news that while we are enemies to God he never looks upon us as his enemies. The good news is our text for this morning, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Even though you wear a black hat, God has never quit loving you! Whoever you are, whatever you may have done, God himself has paid the price of your sin, your rebellion, your brokenness, for Jesus has died for your Sin. That is the miracle of God's love--the miracle that while we were yet sinners--men who wear black hats, men who are enemies to God--God sent his son to die for our Sin.

If you can accept the fact that you wear a black hat and that you are an enemy to God, he offers you two things this morning. First, he offers you forgiveness. As a free gift of love, God offers you forgiveness this morning. It isn't cheap forgiveness. It isn't forgiveness that comes from the five and ten cent store. It is forgiveness that cost--and the cost was the cross on Calvary. God offers that gift to every enemy he has this morning and he offers it to you. It can be yours--without cost, without price. The only requirement is that you accept it, that you receive it. If I have a gift to give you and hold it out to you it is not truly yours until you reach out with your own hands and receive it. I hold before you this morning Jesus Christ. He is God's gift to you, God's forgiveness. But it is not yours until you receive him, until you by an act of faith ask him to be received into your heart as your personal Saviour.

So the first gift God offers his enemies is forgiveness. The second gift God offers is power to begin right now to live a new life for him. Because you wear a black hat, you have already found out you can't live a perfect life for God. But God offers you a second gift, the gift of power to live for him. God offers you power to live not as an enemy, but as a friend, as a member of his family, as his child. He offers you power to live not as a foe, but a friend, not as a challenger, but as a child.

And what is that second gift? It is the Holy Spirit! It is the living presence of God in the world today. God wants to plug your life into his spiritual power. By the power of his Holy Spirit he wants you to know the power of a spirit-filled life.

That's what God wants to do for you--he wants to help you take off your black hat. He offers us who have been enemies to him forgiveness in Jesus; he offers us power to live a new life for him by putting his Holy Spirit into our hearts.

No, we won't be perfect. There will come times when we blow a spiritual fuse and the power won't come on. There will be times when we shut off the switch and try to live on our own power--only to discover we can't. But as long as we try again, as long as we will turn the switch back on, we are people who live under the shadow of the cross; we are people who live under forgiveness. You see, God knows neither of us will always be successful in living for him, but as long as we keep trying, he will always forgive us and give us fresh new power.

As you prepare to leave this morning, let me ask you one question--be careful how you answer, for your eternal salvation hangs in the balance--what color hat do you wear?