

- Have you ever been driving and you see someone blow past you, speeding way in excess and weaving in and out of traffic? You shake your head in irritation. About 10 minutes later you see flashing lights and as you drive by, that car has been pulled over and is in the process of being ticketed.
 - Doesn't that feel good? Why?
 - There is something inside of us that demands that there be justice.
 - There is something compelling about reading a book or watching a movie where the bad guy gets it.
 - We cheer for the hero (or anti-hero) who makes things right, who uses force if necessary to right wrongs.
 - The story of Robin Hood, who takes from the rich who take advantage of those under them and gives to those poor people is an enduring story.
 - The problem is that we most often love justice to be meted out to others. What happens when we deserve justice? What happens when we are the ones in the cross hairs because of our transgressions?
- In our current teaching series, we are reviewing the foundations of what we believe as Christ-followers because **HOW I RESPOND TO LIFE IS DETERMINED BY WHAT I BELIEVE.**
 - Here's what we've done so far:
 - *"We believe in God the Father*
 - *Almighty Maker of the heavens and the earth"*
 - God is all powerful, the creator of all things and desires to be in relationship with us.
 - *"And in Jesus Christ His Son*
 - *Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit*
 - *He was born of the Virgin Mary"*
 - Jesus is fully God and was fully human, which means he is powerful enough to do anything but understands us. When he invites us to follow him, we can trust him.
 - *"He suffered under Pontius Pilate*
 - *He was crucified and dead and buried*
 - Some versions also say: *"He descended to the depths of hell"* – I will touch on that later.
 - Jesus did not simply come to earth to hang with us. He came with a purpose. To satisfy the need for justice while restoring what had been lost.
 - Have you ever wondered why God just didn't declare it to be so? Why he hadn't just given us some tasks to complete, or why he didn't just forgive?
 - **JESUS' DEATH BRINGS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR FREEDOM**
 - Why is Jesus death so crucial to our life and freedom? How do we respond and continue to respond?
- We just celebrated the death (and resurrection) of Jesus a couple of weeks ago at Easter.
 - It was not simply a commemoration like a memorial service where we remember that someone died honorably.
 - It's a death that is the fulcrum of history.
 - Before we jump into that part, we need to really understand why it was so necessary. It was necessary because:

I. We have a problem.

A. We are rebellious and sinful.

- God created us to reflect his nature. To represent him. To have a genuine, unfettered relationship with him.
- Adam & Eve rebelled. Their sin was not just doing something God said not to (eating fruit he was told not to – it seems juvenile, like having a child eat a cookie they weren't supposed to).
- It was a statement, a belief that they knew better than God. In eating, Adam and Eve doubted God's character and intentions. They decided God's law, which flows from who he is, wasn't for their best. They put themselves before God.
- We feel the disastrous results of that decision.
- Our environment changed. The earth does not respond or produce as it was originally created, but it takes sweat and toil to gain anything.
- Our bodies are cursed. We are subject to illness, sickness, pain and death in our bodies. (Example: my back)
- Our very nature changed. Jeremiah 17:9 says that we are "deceitful and desperately wicked." We have no capacity for anything genuinely good or right.
- The worst part is that our relationship with God was broken. There is no more intimate personal communion with God directly. We've lost our perfect standing before God. We are banished from God's presence. There is a barrier to communing with him.
- To top it all off, we are destined to face judgment before God. God, in his justice, cannot ignore our rebellion.

B. We are responsible for our sin.

Hebrews 9:27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

- We are accountable for every action, thought, inclination and decision we make. We will stand before God to have these revealed and examined.
- The problem we too frequently have is that we look at our sins and do one of three things:
- 1) Ignore them altogether – we pretend that there is no problem. Everything is fine.
- The phrase I hear over and over is: "I'm a good person."
- Ignoring a problem never, ever ends well.
- 2) Perhaps we don't ignore our sins, but we minimize them.
- It's not so bad. I'm really better than most. Even when we acknowledge our sins, we say the right things (I'm really broken) but we think a little different (I'm not as broken as I used to be or as much as they are).
- This is always about comparing.
- "At least I don't . . ." I know I did that, but at least I didn't kill anyone.
- We can always find people worse than us (from our perspective) who make us feel better about ourselves.
- 3) We excuse them.
- This is the blame game.
- "It's not my fault." I'm genetically predisposed to this. It was how I was raised. It's their fault that they did that to me. I'm just responding to what they did. It's just who I am and if they don't like it, that's on them.
- At heart, this is not taking responsibility.
- Here's the thing. You are NOT a good person. You AREN'T better than others. It IS your fault. We need to recognize them.

- You see, there are consequences for our rebellion. The punishment for rebellion is death.
- God created us. He formed us. We are a product of his love, generosity, creativity and energy. We exist at and for his pleasure. When we live our way, the penalty is to take away that life from us and to be punished.

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

- Some people say there is no hell. A loving God wouldn't make hell. Some say eventually we all end up in heaven. Some say that hell isn't eternal. Jesus actually talked about hell a lot.

Matthew 25:46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

- When Jesus spoke of hell he used the word "Gehenna" or "Gehenna of fire". This was originally a valley south of Jerusalem where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned.
- This is our problem. This is our future. This is what we deserve. The worst part of the problem is that:

C. We cannot fix it.

- You can never be good enough, be holy enough, serve enough, do enough good deeds, love enough, or anything else to fix it.

Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

- The word Isaiah uses is one used to describe used menstrual rags. Filthy. Disgusting.
- God, who is both absolutely holy and yet entirely just cannot let us “off the hook.”
- If God is holy, he cannot ignore sin as if it does not exist.
- If God is just, then sin must be punished. If it were left unpunished, then there is no divine justice.
- What was the solution to the problem? How could God remain just and yet justify rebellious people?

28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

- **JESUS' DEATH BRINGS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR FREEDOM**

II. Jesus' death is the solution.

- Jesus himself said it this way.

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

- Since the penalty for our rebellion and sin is death, someone had to die. That someone was Jesus.

A. He had to be sinless.

- We touched on this briefly last week.
- Jesus was born from Mary, a virgin, through the Holy Spirit. He lived a perfect life. Adam cursed the entire human race by sinning and so everyone after him was born with a bent to sinfulness.
- The bible calls Jesus a kind of “second Adam.” One who was born and lived like Adam, but who unlike Adam never made a mistake.

1 John 3:5 But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

1 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- Even Jesus himself asserted his perfection.

John 8:29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.

John 8:46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?

- The fact that Jesus was sinless is what qualified him to be a sacrifice for our sins. Not only did he need to be our substitute and receive the punishment that was due me (death), he also had to fulfill God's law perfectly to secure the blessings of God's covenant.
- *"The sinlessness of Christ does not merely serve as an example to us. It is fundamental and necessary for our salvation. Had Christ not been the "lamb without blemish" He not only could not have secured anyone's salvation, but would have needed a savior Himself. The multiple sins Christ bore on the cross required a perfect sacrifice. That sacrifice had to be made by one who was sinless."* (RC Sproul)
- We could only be saved by someone who did not need saving himself.
- God could only be reconciled to man once his justice and law had been satisfied and his wrath appeased.
- If Jesus were a sinner in any sense of the word, then He could not provide salvation for us. However, because He came into the world by supernatural means and lived a sinless life, He could be that sacrifice for our sins without spot and without blemish.

B. He had to suffer and die.

- Simply, he took your place.
- We owe God our life, and so someone who was perfect had to take our place.
- Yet it was not enough for him to simply die. He was tortured. He suffered. He went through anguish. Those of you that were here on Good Friday saw us examine the depths of that suffering. Why? Wouldn't a simple beheading have been enough?

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

- Jesus' suffering on the cross showed the devastating nature of sin, the wrath of God, the cruelty of humanity, and the hatred of Satan. At Calvary, mankind was allowed to do his worst to the Son of Man as He became the Redeemer of mankind.
- I wonder what would change if we understood what Jesus really saved us from.
- I need to do an aside on one line that can be confusing. We read "He descended into the depths of hell." What does that mean.
- Some early versions of the Apostles Creed do not even have this line. Some people omit it today. It is based on a section in one of Peter's letter (we call it 1 Peter) that reads like this.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

- One of the most problematic sections in the entire NT. There are different interpretations. Some say he went to hell to preach to give another opportunity to be saved. But that runs contrary to teaching that says we don't get second chances after death.
- Some say it means he went back in time (or refers to the actual time) when people could have been saved before the flood.

- One interpretation is that God was bringing those who were saved but had not left an in between state since Jesus had not yet died, out towards heaven.
- Still others say it is simply symbolic.
- Regardless, the main point is that Jesus physically died. He was dead. His body was not alive. He was buried. He had expired. The cross killed him in our place.

III. His sacrifice can bring life and freedom.

- You have to respond to his sacrifice.
 - You need to be desperate enough to come to Jesus.
- 1 John 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*
- It means not ignoring our sin. It means not minimizing it. We need to call sin for what it is. It means not making excuses.
 - We confess our sins. We believe that Jesus died in our place. We ask Jesus to take up residence in our hearts and be in charge.
 - When we do this, he brings life!
 - We are forgiven. (1 John 1:9) He promised to forgive our sins. They are gone. We have been cleansed. We are holy and clean because of him.
 - We are justified. (Rom 5:1) God no longer counts us as guilty, but rather have been made righteous.
 - We are considered his children. (John 1:12) You've heard the statement "we're all God's children"? It is only when we receive Jesus that we become part of his family.
 - We have eternal life. (2 Cor 5:1) We can be confident that we will spend eternity with him and enjoying the amazing joys of heaven.
 - But it's bigger than this. Many of you have taken that step. You have asked Jesus into your life. We have a new position, but we can have the freedom to live from this.
 - When we accept Jesus sacrifice, we have a new nature. (2 Cor 5:17) He puts a new desire in us. A desire to follow him. To serve him and others.
 - He also redeemed us. (Gal 3:13) We do not need to live in bondage to sin. We are not only freed from our past sins, but have the power to have victory over our current struggles.
 - Jesus becomes our mediator (1 Tim 2:5). He is helping us in our prayers and pleading for us and standing between God and us.
- We can have life. We can have freedom
 - It only comes through Jesus.
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 - There is no other way to know God.
 - We bring nothing to the table. We don't contribute to our own salvation.
 - Every other religion has some level of performance in it. I have to do certain things to gain heaven or forgiveness. The problem is always, how much is enough?
 - Since a sacrifice is required, Jesus did it on our behalf.
 - We dare not hold onto guilt and shame and sin that he gave up his life for.
 - We do not need to live weak lives bound up in sin.
 - We can live with joy and peace instead of worry.