

March 1, 2015

A Sermon Preached by  
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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF DELRAY BEACH

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## “Who’s To Blame?”

Proverbs 20:9

I John 1:5-9

### **Listen for God’s Word:**

*“If we claim, ‘We don’t have any sin,’ we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*

I John 1:8

In January of 2000 I stood in the pulpit in Irving, Texas and said, “Thank you” for the privilege that had been mine for nearly six years to be the pastor of that church. That past week the membership of that church had received in the mail my resignation as their pastor. I had now accepted a call to Pennsylvania.

Following that service a man and woman approached me and asked to join the church. I asked, “Did you hear that I am leaving as the pastor?” “Yes!” was their reply. “That is why we are ready to join!”

That is not what they really said. What they said was that they did hear that I was leaving and that they were sorry to see me go. Nonetheless, they had been visiting for several months had had fallen in love with the membership of the church. They asked again if I would receive them into membership.

When someone wishes to join a

Presbyterian Church there are a few simple questions that must be asked. These questions help to determine how an individual will join. “Have both of you been baptized?” “Yes.” “Are you now an active member of another church?” “No.” Their answers indicated that they would join by Reaffirmation of Faith. “What’s that?” they asked. It’s an honest question and one that is often asked. “The first question,” I responded, “is do you acknowledge your need for God’s forgiveness in the person of Jesus Christ?” “No,” they answered. “What?” I asked them somewhat surprised. “No, we do not need God’s forgiveness.” “Pastor, my wife and I love Jesus very much and are disciplined in how we live. We live in a manner that is consistent with what God asks. We simply do not disobey God.”

After I caught my spiritual balance I said to them how sorry I was but that I just remembered that the next Sunday the leaders of the church received new members was the first Sunday after I had left.

Pay attention to our lesson this morning. The Bible tells us clearly – in both the Old and New Testament – that if we claim that we are innocent before

God we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. God calls us to reach down to the bottom of the human soul, to cast a light in the dark places where our sin is hidden, so God can deal with it.

*God will take your stories;  
the stories that bring you  
shame, and nail them to the  
cross. And God will then give  
you another story, a story of  
forgiveness and honor.*

My friend, Howard Edington once said, honesty brings healing, secrets bring shame. God wants to remove our shame. That is accomplished by our honesty with God. It is not necessary to tell any other person. But you have to be honest before God, to reach down to the hidden places of your soul and give your stories to God. God will take your stories; the stories that bring you shame, and nail them to the cross. And God will then give you another story, a story of forgiveness and honor.

The Great actor and film director Woody Allen claims to be an atheist. On one occasion he was asked the question, "If there is a God, and if that God should speak to you, what would you most want to hear him say?" Woody Allen's answer speaks for all people. He said, "If there is a God who should speak to me, I would most want to hear him say three words, 'You are forgiven.'" John says the only way you will ever hear from God the words "you are forgiven" is if you speak the words

"I have sinned."<sup>1</sup>

When the King of Prussia visited a Berlin prison in the 17<sup>th</sup> century all the inmates crowded around him professing their innocence. Each one claimed they had not committed the crimes for which they were imprisoned. Everyone made the same claim – everyone except one man. He remained in his cell and never spoke. The King was intrigued by that. He approached the prisoner and asked, "What are you charged with?" "Theft," answered the prisoner. "Are you guilty?" asked the King. "Yes, my Lord, I am guilty. I am receiving what I deserve." The King then turned to the guards and said – with considerable urgency – get this man out of here and release him! I don't want him contaminating all these innocent people. Well, that speaks to our teaching from John this morning, doesn't it? There is something about being honest with God that sets us free from yesterday's failures.

*Sin sours our life,  
poisons the soul, and  
consumes us with darkness.*

How does Jesus do that? Jesus takes the blame, the responsibility for our sins. Understand, please that someone has to take the blame and responsibility. If no one does, then it is no different than a declaration that the offense was no big deal. Make no mistake, friends. Sin is a big deal. Think about your own sin that you have tucked away from everyone. How does it make you feel?

Do you need further convincing that your sins are a big deal? Sin sours our life, poisons the soul, and consumes us with darkness.

Life is diminished by our sin and we live with the weight of guilt and shame. Sin is serious because it has serious consequences upon the quality of our life. So God takes our sin seriously. That is because God takes us seriously. God wants for us a life unfettered by guilt and shame, a life that is lived in the daylight, a life that is lived in joy. So in His Son, Jesus, God says, “I take the blame, I take the consequences – all the way to the cross where they are destroyed.”

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Sometime ago a historian writing for *The Atlantic* magazine suggested that June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944 is the most significant day in modern history. That was the day of the Normandy invasion where thousands of lives were lost. But did you know that the full responsibility for that massive invasion fell squarely upon the shoulders of General Dwight D. Eisenhower? The night before the invasion this four-star General spent hours visiting the young soldiers under his command. He spoke to them with affection, like a father to a son, like he was speaking to each of them for the last

time. Then as wave after wave of planes and boats and troops headed off into the darkness Eisenhower stood transfixed, his eyes filled with tears.

Eisenhower then returned to his quarters and with his own hand wrote a message that was to be delivered to the White House in the event the invasion failed. Of course, the invasion didn't fail so the message was never delivered to the White House. But it did make it into history. Here is what Eisenhower wrote: “Our landings have failed. The troops, the air, the navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame attaches to this event, it is mine alone.”

Of all the bravery that day this may have been the bravest of them all, argues the historian. The General took the blame before the blame needed to be taken. That is what we see in the life of Jesus. Jesus says, “I know you are going to fail. It is serious. It can darken your life forever. Come to me. I take the blame, all of it.” It is, my dear friends, the only way we can ever hope to move past the guilt and shame of our brokenness and enjoy God forever. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Allen, *Preaching the Word: 1-3 John: Fellowship in God's Family*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013), 31.

