

**A Good Friday Service  
April 2011**

It was paradise  
Not a fantasy kind of paradise  
A real paradise  
The earth was freshly green  
Water sprung from the ground  
Trees blossomed with delicious fruit  
Man and animal knew no fear of one another  
And man and woman, their love was perfect  
They hid nothing from one another  
There was nothing to hide

One tree in paradise God said was not for food  
To eat it would mean death  
Thus came a choice  
A choice to obey God  
A choice to trust in his word  
A choice on which the door of paradise hinged  
Oh, that it would never be closed  
But it was  
The choice was made  
God was doubted  
The fruit of the tree was consumed  
And just like that  
Paradise was lost

Sin entered the world  
Not like a tiny blot on an otherwise masterpiece  
But like a disease  
Shame and blaming came first  
Then jealousy and murder  
Rape and incest were quick to follow  
Nation would rise against nation  
Power and greed ruled the day  
The poor were oppressed  
Children sacrificed to idols  
Hatred, guile, fury, and obsessions  
No, not one was righteous, not even one  
God was pushed aside

Critical  
That is what we are  
Those foolish creatures of the past we say  
Could not they control themselves?  
Could not they have chosen rightly?  
Could not they have stamped out sin along the way?

Broken families  
Drunken nights  
Lying leaders  
Enron scandal

Rwanda massacre  
9/11 terror  
Taxes not paid  
Teachers not respected  
Wives not loved  
Centuries of slavery...on our soil  
Millions of abortions...from our wombs  
Unchecked anger...in our hearts

We are better?  
I think not  
There was a paradise  
It was lost  
Sin entered the world  
And we have made it our own

Our own. Sin is our own. I'd like to say that it is a social construction of which I am not to blame. I'd like to say that I am an innocent victim of generations past. I'd like to say that sin is some sort of abstract Teflon concept that cannot really stick to me as a flesh and blood creature. But I can't. Whatever else might be said about sin, I must say that it is as real as the rising sun and has become my own. It may have started back in the days of Adam and Eve. It may have spun in all kinds of directions over the centuries. It may have been given a nice outward appearance at times or been laid out rather raw. But in the end it became my own. I sinned. You and I sinned. You and I made the choice to not walk in God's way. To not love him with all our heart. To not love our neighbor or our family member or our co-worker or our classmate. To be mean and ugly and dishonest. Those have been our choices. We cannot blame anyone else. We have sinned.

Some bristle at this idea. They think of sin as a Victorian term used by the then powerful religious elite to keep people under their thumb so to speak. We need not be bound by such antiquated terms, they say. But I say, call it what you want because no matter what term we use it does not change sin's reality in our lives.

- We still hide our own addictions
- We still shade financial statements to hide more than they reveal.
- We still figure out ways to cheat when we take exams
- We still boast about things in which we only played a part
- We still follow the links on the internet to places we shouldn't go
- We still belittle our husband or wife
- We still lust after more and more attention
- We still let anger fester, spill over, and explode
- We still, we still, we still

You see, we might call sin this or that...but it does not change the fact that sin is real and that it is our own.

I wonder how you identify yourself. Perhaps you say I am a salesperson or a teacher or a mom. Maybe you say I am a musician or an athlete or an attorney. Maybe you think of yourself as smart or not so much. Maybe you think you are pretty or organized or educated or sensible. Maybe you think of yourself as outgoing or quiet, friendly or self-sufficient. But whatever the case, my hunch is that all of you think that in one manner or another you are a bit better than others. And you think not that just in terms of some talent, you mean it at a deeper moral level. You really are at the core just plain better than may others...at least better than some. Well, let me tell you, it isn't so.

The Apostle Paul writes:  
"There is no one righteous, not even one;

there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.  
All have turned away, they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good, not even one."  
"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit."  
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."  
"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."  
"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways,  
and the way of peace they do not know."  
"There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Rom 3:10-18, NIV)

You see, we are all in the same boat. A very big boat. A boat that fits the whole of humanity. A boat that has sin written all over it.

Have you ever thought what it would be like if all your sins were posted on a wall? I mean all of them. What if before the world was every deed and every thought was there for all to see? Everything you should not have done and everything you should have done but didn't was put on display. I have thought of that quite often in the last couple of weeks and it has absolutely terrified me. I think I would die of shame. At the very least, I would run as far away as I could and live where no one could find me. Wouldn't you? If all the times you stole something or hurt people or cheated or lied or turned the cold shoulder or fed your lust or gave that look of disdain or took revenge were posted like they are in this wall, it would be the end of you. Wouldn't it?

Now you might say, "But this image, John, of my sin being public is no different than a bad dream." Sure it's a terrifying thought but it's not really going to happen. You are right; it's not going to happen. People in this life never see all of your sin, but I can tell you that every single bit of it is on display before God. Every motive, every action, every inaction is there before him. And when he sees it, he does not dismiss it as inconsequential. He calls it for what it is—sin.

And when he calls it sin, he pronounces both a judgment and a sentence. The judgment is guilty. He allows no excuses. He does not let us say our sin was someone else's fault. He does not let us blame our upbringing or the prejudice and hatred of others. He does not let us off the hook if no one took us by the hand and told us all about God and his ways. He says this sin of ours is our own. He says we are guilty.

And then he gives us the sentence. And the sentence is this: "You wicked and lazy servant. Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:26-41). I didn't make that up. That is what Scripture says. Scripture tells us that our sin has separated us from God (Is 59:2). Scripture says that our sin has brought about the curse of God (Gal 3:10). Scripture says our sin, and even our best efforts, is like filthy rags (Is 64:6). Scripture tells us that our sin places us in the camp of Satan and under his dominion (Eph 2:2). Scripture says that because of our sin, we already stand condemned (John 3:18). It's not a pretty picture, is it?

This sin...it is the great mar on humanity...it is the scarlet letter we cannot remove...it is what wrecks our lives...it is what keeps us from seeing reality for what it is...it is the badge of impending death...it is our own. So help us God.

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Judgment and condemnation...that is what our sin deserves. God is right and just when he pronounces his judgment. If this was the wall of my life and all the details of each of my sins were provided to you, you would want nothing to do with me. You would want to lock me up, or send me away, or spit on me, or exterminate me. How much more so the holy one of God! This sin of ours deserves every ounce of the judgment of God.

And then comes Good Friday. Good Friday...that's what today is. Good Friday. Sort of a funny name, isn't it? It's the day we remember when a man underwent a horribly shameful and excruciating death that he did not deserve—a death that was brought about by evil and wicked men who killed him to preserve their place of privilege in society. And yet it's Good Friday. And it is Good Friday because that man was God in the flesh. And

it's Good Friday because Jesus Christ, the God-man, looked at our wall of sin and shame and said, "Something must be done about this. I will not run and hide from it. I will not write off these people for all eternity. I do not want to stamp them out. I want them to be set free from sin. I want them to be with me forever. And if that costs me the cross, so be it."

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men." So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:11-24, NIV)

Jesus today looks at your wall of sin. And yes, he sees every bit of it. He knows it to the very greatest detail. He knows all your failings. He knows all your wickedness. He knows all your deceit. He knows all your selfishness. He knows all your apathy. He knows all your vanity. And yet through the cross he says, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on her feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; my daughter was lost but is now found." I have paid the price. I have taken on your shame unto myself. I know your sin. I know it all. But this cross of mine changes everything. You are mine forever.

It's Good Friday!! It's Good Friday!! This wall of shame...this sin that deserves to separate us from God a thousand times over...is taken care of. You can run to Jesus. He will run to you. You can dance and sing and jump for joy because he has done everything. It's Good Friday. Thanks be to God!

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I am not so sure there is anything sweeter than rejoicing in the goodness of the work of Christ on our behalf. We have celebrated the Lord's Supper here this evening. It's what Jesus wanted us to do. He wanted us to do this and he wants us to do it regularly because he wants his wonderful work to remain front and center. He wants to remember the game-changing goodness of Good Friday.

But there is something very important for us to understand about the Goodness of Good Friday that we celebrate with communion. And that something is this, the Goodness of Christ's work, while available to all is only applicable to those who turn to Jesus, who get sick of the pig pen and say, "O Jesus, you know the wall of sin in my life. And you and I know that what is on that wall, I can blame no one else for. Jesus I need you to take care of my sin through the work of your cross. I need you to be the king of my life from this day forward. I need you to turn from the things of the past to your way." That's no easy admission. But here is the good part: Jesus isn't going to hear your call out to him, and look over your sin wall and decide if he wants to make you part of His family. He's not going to look over your resume to see if you have the qualifications to be a member of his kingdom. He knows better than you and I that we would all fail on those accounts. No, what he is going to do when he sees you turn to him in this way is run to you. The King of kings, the Holy One is going to run to you. He is going to throw his arms around you. He is going to kiss you. And he is going to clothe you in robes of righteousness so that you might be dressed to the nines...for the party that heaven will hold on your behalf.

But as beautiful as this picture is, the alternative is equally ugly. You see, if you don't acknowledge that sin is your own...if you figure you are pretty good person and have nothing to worry about...if you figure that you are just fine without Jesus...if you don't want to relinquish the right to rule your life to His kingship...if you do not recognize the goodness of Good Friday...then there is no goodness in Good Friday for you. In fact, Jesus said, "Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already" (John 3:18). And that condemnation Jesus speaks of is not just an abstract judgment; it is one that comes with deep consequences. As Apostle Paul writes: God will punish those who do not know him and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thes 1:8-9, NIV).

Good Friday is no game. The sin that fills are life is not just some antiquated way of speaking of insignificant foibles. It is real. Christ's death is not some mythological story that has been dramatically rewritten over the centuries. It is as real as the setting sun and has the power to take care of our sin in every way. And it is real that those who turn to Christ and "man up" about their failures will know the goodness of Good Friday, while those who don't will be stuck in their sins and will know a hellish future beyond imagination.

I urge you then today, if you have not done so, to turn to Christ. To call your sin what it is and call out to him to be your Savior and King. For if you do that, this Friday, this Friday, will indeed be good for you.