

Series: Sin Kills

Message 4: What hope do sinners have?

(NOTE: This service has music and teaching woven together. We note, then, the songs used in the service along with the teaching text.)

Song: Welcome To My Life

I ache every time I hear that song. It captures pieces of the effects of being broken, sinful people in a broken, sinful world. Sin has left a deep mark on us. It has left us condemned, demoralized, deceived, addicted, and alienated from others and from God. Sin and its consequences are our life. Perhaps there is an effect or consequence of sin that you are feeling more keenly than others today.

I want you to think about a word or phrase that describes an effect or emotion of sin that you are feeling right now or have felt recently. Perhaps it is a word from the song, "Welcome to My Life," words like "hurt" or "lost" or "edge of breaking down" or "don't belong" or "no one understands" or "left out." Perhaps the word for you would be "scared, overwhelmed, angry, hopeless, depressed, out-of-control, sad, worthless, lonely, mad at God, empty, confused, powerless, distant from God, grieved, judged, wounded, resistant to God, deceived, ashamed, or addicted." Maybe there is another word or phrase that comes to mind. I would like for you to write down that word or phrase on the label you received when you came in this morning.

Here is what you can do next if you wish. During the next song, you are invited to come down and put that label on this cross. Slap it anywhere on the cross that you wish.

Song: Fix You

(People come down during the song to put their label on the cross.)

So, what is the hope for sinners? What is the fix? Is there a fix at all? Is there hope for sinners who are condemned, discouraged, overwhelmed, addicted, deceived, distant, and guilty? Consider this word from the Bible:

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still **powerless**, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been **justified** by his blood, how much more shall we be **saved from God's wrath** through him! ¹⁰For if, when we were God's enemies, **we were reconciled to him** through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (The Bible, Romans 5:6-11 NIV)*

Roger speaks about "Pardon."

The hope that sinners have is the unthinkable love of God. It breaks God's heart to see sin condemn us, alienate us, demoralize us, chain us, harden us, deceive us, and suck the life out of us. God saw that our sin was killing us and that we were powerless to save ourselves. There was only one possible solution, but it was unthinkable.

God would have to make an unimaginable sacrifice. He would have to become a human like us, and He would have to take the brunt of His own righteous judgment against sin on Himself. For this to happen, He would have to take our sin on Himself. Our evil would be ascribed to Him, so that He could take our judgment. That's what it would cost Him, and He did chose to do just that.

It is a mystery that God is one, yet three--a three-in-one God: Father, Son, and Spirit. But this three-in-one God made our rescue possible. God, the Father, in His justice, poured out the judgment on our sin. God, the Son--Jesus--in His love, chose to take the judgment of our sin on Himself, and God, the Spirit, in His power, applies the saving work to every person who humbles Himself to receive it.

So, the Bible says:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21

Don't misunderstand this word "made." God the Father did not force the Son. It was a chosen act of love. Just as we have willingly chosen to break God's laws, so God, the Son had to willingly choose to take our punishment. It could not be forced. God made it possible for our sins to be put on Jesus, but He did not "make" Jesus die for us. Jesus chose to. It was an act of love. More than that, we are told that it brought Him great joy to save us.

God could never simply ignore our sin; That would be unjust and unloving. His wrath or judgment had to be executed, but He took that wrath on Himself in our place. And because Jesus took the righteous judgment for our sin on Himself, God can remove us from that judgment.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! (The Bible, Romans 5:9 NIV)

The word for being saved from God's wrath is this word, "pardon." Think of what a pardon means to someone. Someone comes to your cell. The door is opened. You are led out. You expect that a guest has come to see you, but you are taken through door after door until you arrive at an office, where you are told you've been pardoned. You go home today. It's hard to fathom what that would feel like. But it is the feeling we should have because God has extended an inexplicable pardon to us. God is amazing.

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. Micah 7:18

Because of the unthinkable love of God, we can be pardoned, but only because He took the brunt of sin for us. The pardon costs us nothing. Securing it for us cost Jesus dearly. As we sing the next songs, I am going to break a loaf of bread into pieces to picture Jesus taking the punishment of our sin upon Himself.

Songs:

**“Welcome to My Life” Reprise (with altered wording)
Into Marvelous Light
Jesus Paid it All**

Roger talks about “Forgiveness”

As huge as a pardon is, God does more. This past week, tens of thousands of people died, but there is one death that has been talked about more than any other. Any guesses? Sure. Michael Jackson. The international outpouring of grief over his death has been staggering. Watching man-on-the-street interviews, I heard fans describe the pain of losing a member of their family. I heard friends and associates talk about the “man in the mirror,” a tortured and reclusive and complex individual.

I heard one friend describe Jackson’s deepest pain was that people saw him as a child molester. So powerful was this pain that this friend described Jackson’s planned London tour as his way of somehow redeeming himself with the public. I do not know what Jackson’s sins were; I am not God, but I can tell you this. One of the great pains of sin is that our choices become attached to us; they get attached to our identity. They define how we see ourselves, and they define how others see us. In our minds and in the minds of others, labels can get attached to us: loser, addict, bigot, cheater, low-life, selfish, failure, unfaithful, snob, liar, prima donna, pig, back-stabber, molester, ingrate, rebel, thief, racist, etc. In this sense, our sin and brokenness places enormous weight on us. They mark us. (Of course, there is the unique pain that comes when sins we haven’t done get attached to us.)

In the death of Jesus on a cross, we also receive the most remarkable gift. God clears our name. He separates our sin from our identity. We are no longer losers and cheats and snobs and liars and bigots and back-stabbers. We are no longer “felons.” Our record is cleared. Our sins are no longer attached to us. We don’t have to redeem ourselves; We are redeemed by Jesus. Our sins are no longer attached to us. One image the Bible uses is this: our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. That distance is really infinite. Another image is our sins being on the ocean floor. So, the Bible says:

Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. Ps. 32:2

When we humbly turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness, our sins are no longer counted against us. They are no longer attached to us. We don’t have to redeem

ourselves; We are redeemed by God Himself. How is this possible? How can it be that our sins are no longer "attached" to us? Because they were attached to Jesus. Remember what we read from the Bible just a few minutes ago:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21

Our sins were attached to Jesus. He took on our sinful identity: loser, thief, killer, back-stabber, snob, addict, molester, cheat, you add any label. There is very powerful symbolism in the death Jesus died. He died as a felon. Roman crucifixion was for the worst of criminals. Even Jewish tradition said, "cursed is the one who hangs on a tree." Jesus died carrying the identity of a loser, a lawbreaker, a rebel, a danger to kids, a thief. The most shameful things we have ever done were attached to Jesus. We sometimes sing the line in a song: "I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross." I hope you will never sing that line the same way again.

I can remember thinking at some point in my life: How bad could it be for Jesus to die? He knew He was coming back to life. How painfully naïve I was. I failed to take in all that this "death" involved, particularly this: Jesus became my sin. And why? So, I could be seen as faultless. Because Jesus took on the identity of my sin, it is no longer attached to me, as far as God is concerned. I no longer carry the identity of a sinner, a loser, but only because Jesus took that identity for me and then took the judgment of God for my sin. And so the Bible says:

In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. Ephesians 1:7 NIV

There is the simplest of meals Jesus instructed us to eat as a graphic, tangible reminder of what it cost Him to pardon us and clear our sin record. The meal is bread and juice, which we are going to serve in this service. The bread will be passed by you in a moment. You may take a piece if you wish. The eating of that bread carries great weight. It is you saying, I receive His righteousness for my shameful choices. At the end of this next song, we'll eat the bread together.

Songs: Ocean Floor

(The bread is distributed as the song begins.)

Remember the words of Jesus, who said: "Take and eat. This is my body broken for you."

Roger talks about "Reconciliation"

Are you beginning to see or see again how the death of Jesus Christ is the hope for sinners? He took the judgment of our sin, so that we are no longer condemned. He took the shame of our sin so that we are no longer guilty. Oh, but that is not all. He took the offense of our sin, so that we are no longer alienated from God. We are no longer at odds with God. We are no longer at war. We are at peace.

You see, sin has put us at odds with God. He is whole and good seeking to make the whole world whole and good, but our sin works against His good purposes. As such, we are literally enemies of God. That's God's description. You see, sin goes against everything that God is; It goes against everything God desires. It has marred His creation. It destroys. It drives people from God's heart. That is why God hates sin. It is a destroyer. As sinners, then, we are at cross-purposes with God.

But the cross changes all of that. When Jesus took on our sin, He made it possible for us to be His righteousness. When we humbly admit our deep brokenness, call out to God for forgiveness, and surrender to His love, we are reconciled.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NIV

For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Romans 5:10)

The word that comes out of this for me is the word "peace." We are no longer at odds with God. By His grace and initiative, we are at peace. We are reconciled. We are friends. One thing that friends do is to share a drink, share a meal. So, God welcomes us to share a drink with him this morning. As our next song plays, cups of juice will be passed around which you may take if you wish. In drinking the juice together following the song, we will celebrate peace and friendship with God.

Song: Lamb of God

(The juice will be distributed as this song begins.)

We are welcomed to God's table, where he invites us to drink.

Roger talks about freedom

Through the cross of Jesus, sinners are pardoned. Through the cross of Jesus, sinners are redeemed; their record is cleared. Through the cross of Jesus, sinners are reconciled to God; They are at peace with Him. But that is not all. Through the cross of Jesus, sinners find freedom. I want to try and explain one part of this freedom.

The cross changes the way we relate to God from law to love. The Bible tells us that the law came after sin. Before sin came into the world, there was no law. The law, God's rules, revealed the ways in which we fall short of God. But sin in us and the law ended up creating a trap. We were led to believe that keeping laws was the way to make God happy and to avoid judgment. Look around; Every single religious system is built around keeping rules to keep God from being ticked at us.

The way of the law is marked by fear, failure, and futility. We know we fail. We know we don't measure up. We know our choices are broken, and it seems that the harder we try to do right, the more we struggle to do so. This futility leads to despair which leads to more failure. We believe that God is ticked at us for failing so much, but we are helpless to change the cycle. The fear of God's anger isn't strong enough stuff to keep us from breaking his laws. It is a desperate cycle that locks us down.

But the cross blows up the way of the law. In fact, the Bible says that the law with its regulations was nailed to the cross, was killed. Here's how. Jesus Christ, in the single greatest act of love, chose to take our judgment, our sin, our shame so that we could be pardoned, and guilt-free. He did not go to the cross because of law, but because of love. He went, not to keep a rule, but to lavish love on us.

In the greatest act of love ever, Jesus broke the power of fear and failure and futility. Our sins and failures no longer condemn us before God. Sin and its labels are no longer attached to us. There is nothing we have to do to reconcile ourselves to God or keep Him happy. We are freed up to simply love Him and love others as He has loved us. When we trust Jesus and embrace what He did at the cross, we are freely granted what we've been striving for our whole lives: freedom from the law. There is nothing we have to do to appease God. We are free now to simply love Him, and live in light of this marvelous grace He secured at the cross. I call you to embrace this gift from God again today and enjoy His grace. You're free!

Songs: Enjoying Your Grace, I Am Free, The Stand

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