

I want to start off this morning by reading you an article entitled “Terribly, The News was no Surprise” that first appeared in March of 2001 after a shooting at a high school in San Diego, CA. This article was written by a man named Bob Greene, a nationally syndicated columnist. It reads, “In the hours after the carnage at the school near San Diego—as the sick, too familiar, pit-of-the-stomach feelings returned—the nation once again began to search for answers. Maybe it’s finally time to just admit it: We don’t have the answers. Look around this country. School administrators don’t have the answers, and teachers don’t have the answers, and mothers and fathers don’t have the answers, and police departments don’t have the answers. The president of the United States doesn’t have the answers and the Congress doesn’t have the answers...”

“But even if we, as a society, were able to prevent every student from having a firearm, we would still be left with the harder question: Why? Why has it come to this? Why do students murder? One theory...is that there is a growing soullessness in the land, a vacuum inside some young people: a vacuum whose utter emptiness is beyond our comprehending. The reason we as a society are struggling as we throw stopgap measures at the schools is that if we really knew—if we genuinely understood how to stop this—then we would have done it already...”

“What we are dealing with is something so profound that it belongs as much to the area of theology as it does to education or law enforcement. Our attempts to construct barriers of safety around our schools—however well-intentioned the efforts—are just bandages over a wound that is growing too big...”

Now there is a recognition there that there is something wrong going on here. And that article appeared not in a Christian magazine, but in a secular newspaper. You almost feel sorry for the guy. He’s looking around seeing all this awful pain and suffering and he’s saying, “What’s causing this?” and also, “We can’t fix this.” He’s like lots of folks. Why is there such pain in this world, and in my life...and can anything be done to fix it? This morning I want to tell you with complete confidence that the answer is yes and that answer is found in the person of Jesus Christ and in His death and resurrection.

In the midst of a passage of 1 Peter 3, Peter includes a verse that shares with us the great news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s found in 1 Peter 3:18 and it reads, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” In that short verse we see why it was necessary that Christ die on the cross and the impact His death had on all of us.

Now the first thing we see here is that it is necessary that Jesus died on the cross because as much as we hate saying it, the truth is that we are all sinners. Now like we said, it is no surprise that there is something terribly wrong with mankind, something within us that makes us do bad things. Paul said the things I want to do I don't do, and the things I don't want to do, I do. *Last week I had to catch myself. Last Saturday night, I was at Wal-mart and I was already having a bad day. I was trying to print out my sermon for the next day and the ink ran out, so at about 11:30 at night I had to go to Wal-mart to get some ink. I put on my clothes and I was wearing a Kentucky sweatshirt. Now last Saturday is the day that the LSU tigers beat Kentucky. As I was in the cereal aisle, a group of college kids walked by, about 3 boys and 2 girls, and when they saw me in my shirt, one of the boys yelled out, "Go Tigers!" Now I'm a nice guy, a pastor, and I reasoned this was a kid trying to look cool in front of his friends, so I let it pass didn't say anything. But in my mind, I was going over all the things I wish I would have said. Later on I was getting the ink, on the other end of the store, and this same group of kids come by, and would you believe this idiot did it again. "Go Tigers" This time I couldn't let it pass. I said, "Did you even watch the game?" And his friends started saying that it was a good game and they walked away.*

You see, there is something in us that causes us to do think bad things and do bad things. The bible calls it sin. And we see the evidence of this all around us, in you and in me, and it becomes more evident as the days go by. Many look at the symptoms and see that there is something terribly wrong with us, to cause us to do the things we do, to ourselves and to each other, and to God.

It's called sin and at times the consequences are almost unbearable. *About 5 years ago I came across a story that has stuck with me. It first appeared in Time magazine and it was about what a reporter had seen during the war in Sarajevo. The reporter was watching as a woman and her son walking across the street when a sniper shot the little boy, who he said appeared to be only about 8 years old, and he shot him in the head, and then he shot the mom, but he did not shot her in the head, but he shot her in the stomach so that she would have to watch her son die.* Now when you hear about that, you wonder what in the world can make someone be so heartless and callous? How could someone do something like that? Well the scary answer is, that it's the same thing that caused me to lash out at that kid in Wal-Mart and it's the same thing that causes all of us to do what we do. Its called sin, and its not just that terrible murder where we see the consequences. We see it everywhere.

Max Lucado wrote, "You've seen the chaos. The husband ignoring his wife. The dictator murdering the millions. Grown men seducing the young. The young propositioning the old. When you do what you want, and I do what I want, and no one gives a lick as to what God wants, humanity implodes. As Joseph Alleine wrote: "O miserable man, what a deformed monster has sin made you! God made you 'little lower than the angels;' sin has made you little better than the devils." (and then he writes) Extract God; expect earthly chaos and, many times worse, expect eternal misery." Our problem is sin and the bible says that unless we repent of that sin, we will die in that sin.

Sin has consequences. Now that may sound like a typical ranting of a preacher, but it is the truth. We see the pain and the suffering sin has caused. But the greatest tragedy that has resulted from sin is our separation from God. God is holy and sin cannot be left unpunished, and so now we are left with this daunting condemnation...the wages of sin is death. And left to our own power, there is nothing we can do about it. As Bob Greene said in the article I read to you at the beginning of this message, "It's a wound that despite our efforts is growing bigger and bigger."

But enter the good news. Christ died for sins once and for all. What we were incapable of doing, Christ did for us. He died for us. Well why couldn't God just forgive? Why did Jesus have to die? Well, the issue is justice. When a wrong is committed, we want justice to be served. *You might remember how a few months back there was an uproar about a Vermont judge who gave a ridiculously light sentence to a convicted child molester. Now the judge was trying to be a nice guy, but there was an outcry because the punishment did not meet our standard of justice. We didn't want that judge to simply let that convicted child molester off the hook, if there was a crime, we want justice to be served.*

Well every sin is a crime against God, and justice must be served. And we are told that the wages of sin is death. And because God so loved us sinners, He gave us the cross that was designed by God to be a payment for the sins of mankind. **Hebrews 9:22** says, **"In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."** Now I can't tell you that I fully understand that, but the Bible does say that the without the shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness and that the life is in the blood. In the Old Testament we see that the yearly sacrifices were to prepare us for the ultimate sacrifice that was to come, a lamb from God without blemish that would be the payment for our sins. *Forgiveness lies in the blood and Jesus bled. From the nails in His hands to the crown of thorns on His head, to the spear in His side, to the*

bruises on His back, and the blood spilled from his skinned knees when He stumbled and fell. Jesus died for our sins.

This is the Gospel in a nut shell. We are guilty of sin and our sins deserve death and have separated us from God, but God loved us so much that He would do whatever it took to get us back. So Jesus came to this world. He entered as a baby, walked the earth for thirty odd years, and when the time was right, He went to the cross for you and me. Although He had no sin of his own, (even Pilate couldn't find no fault in Him) He took on our sins...as Peter put it...the righteous for the unrighteous. He was perfect in everyway, yet He took our guilt, our shame, our sin and nailed it to the cross. Now you may think that you do not need what Christ offers you. You're good enough, you've done no wrong in your mind. *Reinhold Niebuhr had a wonderful quote, he said, "Most of the evil in this world does not come from evil people. It comes from people who consider themselves good."* Good like us? You know, most of compare ourselves to others and say, look I'm not a bad person. Well, you may not be a bad person, but your not good either.

I don't know if you have seen the film "The Passion of the Christ", but there is a scene in there where under the brutal lash of the Roman guards, Jesus stumbles under the weight of the cross. The guards continue to beat Him until a guard on horseback commands them to stop. He tells them to look at Jesus — that He cannot continue without aid.

One of the guards then looks into the crowd and picks out Simon the Cyrene to help Jesus bear the cross to the execution site. At first, Simon is unwilling to help. He wants no part of these proceedings. When it is evident that the Romans will insist, Simon agrees, but not before proclaiming to the crowd, "I am an innocent man forced to carry a cross for a condemned man!" He wants no confusion — Jesus is the one condemned to die — not him. Jesus is the guilty one, not him.

But when Simon moves underneath the cross to help Jesus carry it, he and Jesus lock eyes for a moment. No words are spoken, but everything about the moment tells the audience that something has passed between Jesus and Simon. And Simon's nervousness about being next to Jesus demonstrates that he is having second thoughts about who is guilty and who is innocent.

You see, It is only when we get close to Jesus, and see Him for who He truly is — the completely holy, sinless Son of God that our own personal halos start to tarnish, turn black, and fall off. It is then we realize that we are indeed sinners guilty before God in need of grace. And grace He gives.

We owed a debt to God that we could not pay, and God in His holiness could not simply overlook that debt. What God's justice demanded, and what God's heart wanted, God's grace provided. The debt had to be paid. So God did the unthinkable. He paid the debt Himself.

That's the amazing love that God has for you. Jesus died a vicarious death on our behalf. His death was not an accident, nor was it a spur of the moment decision. Jesus said, "***No one takes my life from Me but I willingly lay it down.***" He dies not just with you, but He died for you. And He did so, not because we had earned it somehow, or that we deserved it, but He did so because of the amazing love He has for you. That's the love that God has for you. Nails didn't hold Jesus to the cross, it was His amazing love for you that held Him there.

Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous. **1 Pet 2:24** ***He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.*** *I remember hearing about a church performed a drama around Easter time, about a carpenter's family that lived in Jerusalem during the time of Christ. Needing the money a Jewish carpenter agreed to make crosses for the Romans. The carpenter's 10 year old son helped out. Near the end of the play the boy came running into his dad's shop crying and heart broken. His dad said, "What's wrong?" He said, "Dad, there was a mob and they took Jesus and crucified Him." This family had heard Jesus teach. Some of their relatives had been healed by Jesus. They loved Jesus. This was terrible news. The son said, "Dad, there's more. They crucified Jesus on one of the crosses that we made!" The father tried to sooth his son saying, "There are lots of crosses. They all look alike." His son said, "Dad, you don't understand. Last week I was so proud of the one I made that I carved my name into it. When Jesus carried His cross to the hill He stumbled in front of me and I saw my name on His cross!"*

If you could look closely, you would see that your name is on His cross as well. If you were the only person on earth, Jesus would still have come to die on a cross for you. The cross proves that sin is not trivial. It proves that we are valuable. And it proves that forgiveness is possible.

You see the result of the cross as Peter says is that it brought us to God. The cross broke down every barrier that existed between us and God, and now we who were far off have been brought near...the curtain of the temple has been torn in two, and now there is nothing stopping us from having that intimate fellowship with God...except, except for our unwillingness to receive it. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. God is offering us a gift, now its up to us to accept it.

In the last book of the Bible we find the image of Christ standing at the door and knocking. It's one of my favorite verses of the entire bible. The picture comes from **Revelation 3:20** where Jesus offers to enter a lukewarm, lethargic church and have a restored relationship with those who will let Him in. While this passage refers to Christians, it has application to those who have never opened the door of your heart to Christ: ***“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”***

Christ has opened the door to heaven and paid the price of admission with His own blood. And right now, He's knocking at the door of your heart. Let me ask you, will you open yourself to Him right now? If you want to become a Christian, then you must receive Jesus into your life. If you want to be saved, then you must have the Savior. If you're up for it, you can pray this prayer with me. But only do it if your mind, your emotions, and your will are ready.

“Lord Jesus, for too long I've kept you out of my life. I admit that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. I repent of my sins by changing my mind about the way I've been living. No longer will I close the door when I hear you knocking. By faith I gratefully receive your gift of salvation. With all my heart I believe you are the Son of God who died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Thank you for bearing my sins and giving me the gift of eternal life. I believe your words are true. I accept you into my heart. Be my Savior and Lord. I surrender to your leadership in my life. Make me into the person you want me to be. Amen.”