

What's the Message – Lesson 103

Today's topic is: Jesus saves us from the consequences of sin.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, we pray today that You will help us to see more clearly the need for Jesus to save us from sin, and all of its horrible consequences. Then enable us to share this wonderful news with others who do not yet realize the power that sin has over them. Amen.

Last time we talked about the Doctrine of Original Sin, and its consequences. Today we will focus on one of those consequences, guilt and its punishment, death. Teacher, last time we said that there was both the reality of guilt as well as the sense of guilt. Since we did not explain that distinction any further, just exactly what do you mean by that?

Let's take the sense of guilt first. This is something that we think we can deal with. We have a conscience, and when we do something that is contrary to God's will, that little voice within us will disturb us. There is an old story about an Indian who explained his conscience as being a sharp-sided stone that would rotate inside him. When he did something wrong and that little stone rotated, it would cut, and it would make him feel sad. But if he did the bad things often, the stone would wear smooth and not be so sharp as to cut him anymore. That is what we can do to our conscience. We can reduce its effectiveness as a warning message to us. We can, in effect, turn our conscience off.

That is the most typical way we deal with our sense of guilt. We can numb it down, and remove the sense of guilt from our minds. But the Christian has an advantage. Even better than the ceremony of atonement established in Leviticus to forgive sins, we now have the blood of Jesus "*poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matt. 26:28). With our sins removed, so is the burden of our sense of guilt.

Now, contrast that action with the reality of guilt. Can we do anything to remove that? No, the real guilt of sin is something that only God

can deal with. As we said last time and quoted St. Paul, we “*were dead in trespasses and sins*” (Eph. 2:1). Dead people have no power to do anything, so in that state we are completely helpless, because only God can remove the actual guilt of sin.

And what does the guilt of sin bring to mankind? Death. As God said to Adam in Genesis 2:17 about the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: “*the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.*”

People may debate whether or not there is more than one type of death, but there is one fact that is not debatable – it is certain, we will all experience the end of life as we know it. As it has been said by many before, no one gets out of here alive. This, the cessation of the human body to function, we call temporal death. Does being a Christian enable us to escape this type of death? No. Because of the Fall into sin, every human will die this temporal death. But a Christian is free from the sting of death, the eternal separation of man from his Creator.

I suggest that we need to recognize a second type of death, something called “spiritual death.” Let me illustrate this by telling you a true story. Some 30 years ago I was manager of a department in a large corporation, and I had selected a man, who’s name was Jim, to fill an important position.

Jim was a dependable employee, one who accepted responsibility and carried through on every task. In every sense he was a good man on the job. But his personal life was another matter. He was always a law-abiding citizen, but there was emptiness in his life. He and his wife could not have any children, so they adopted two young sisters. That worked well for awhile, but in a few years the wife and daughters left him, and he was all alone – now facing incurable cancer.

Jim had previously told me that he was not a Christian, and did not believe in God. No matter how I tried, this hard shell would not be cracked. Even in his last weeks he refused any of my attempts to tell him of Jesus. His last words to me were, “when I die, it is all over. That is the end, there is no more. A man simply dies and ceases to exist. I accept that. So leave me alone.”

Jim was a good worker, but lived an empty life. Some would call it a wasted, meaningless life.

As Robert Short wrote in **The Gospel According to Peanuts**, this was “a type of spiritual death, a living death, a fate far worse than death, a death which man can actually experience as no less than hell during his lifetime.” In contrast, it is not so with the Christian who feeds on the words of God and lives connected to God.

We understand what Jesus meant when He said, “*I came that (you) may have life, and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10). He has saved us from this type of spiritual death.

And that brings us to the third type of death, the most meaningful one of all, eternal death. This is the death that either unites us, or separates us from our Heavenly Father, not just for a limited jail sentence, but for eternity.

To save us from the sting and pain of this type of death is the reason Jesus came to earth and took on our human flesh. As He said: *I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die* (John 11:25-26).

Next time we will take a fresh look at God’s covenant with Abraham, and with us.