

A WAY HAS BEEN MADE

Years ago, I stood beside the hospital bed of a man named Wally.
Great guy.
Lots of fun.
But Wally was weak and ill.

In fact, he was dying,
and he knew it.

As sad as it was,
it was a beautiful scene.
His wife Kay was there and his children
and a few others who were close to him.

We told him how much we loved him.
We squeezed his hand,
we kissed his face, and
then we prayed.

As we did I thought to myself:
In a few hours Wally will stand before God.
And he will be alone.

All of us in this loving circle gathered around him
will remain behind.
And Wally will be alone.

As I stood there,
I thought about my own death.
I thought if life is good to me,
this is where I will be one day.

Peggy and Stephen and Ian will stand beside me.
We will hold hands
We will tell each other how much we love each other.

Then I will stand before God – alone.
Then he will see my sins
and he will judge my life.

Men,
that hour is coming for me and
that hour is coming for you.

Most of us don't think about that much.
We tend to put it out of our minds
and act like it's not going to happen.
But, of course it is.

And if there is something after this life,
there's the possibility that it will go on for an awfully long time,
maybe forever.
So long that our time on this planet will be less than a drop in the ocean
when compared to length of our existence in that future world.

Joy and bliss or regret and misery.
Reward or punishment.
If it's possible to do something in this world
that determines what our eternity will be like,
it seems like refusing to think about it
is about the worst decision we can make.

So, here's a question for you:
Why should God allow you into heaven?
When you die,
what will you look to,
what will you trust in
to be your entre into a life of blessedness and joy?

I'll give you a second to formulate your answer.
Why should God allow you into heaven?
Come up with an answer and hold onto it.

Paul wrote in

Romans 3.21-25: But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, by his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin through faith in his blood.

I want to tell you four things this morning/evening.
This first is this.

1. GOD LOVES YOU.

God loves you and he wants the best for you.
This is the truest truth of your life.
Your life matters to God.
He desires to bless you
and give you everything that is truly good in life.

Jesus said

John 10.10: The thief comes to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.

Why did Jesus come into the world?
So you could have life.

There are forces in this world that want to harm you and take life from you.
But Jesus says:
that's not me and
that's not why the Father sent me.
I have come to bless you
and to give you an abundant life in this world.

But God's love for us doesn't end
when our life in this world ends.

John 3.16: For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

God wants you to experience life in a way that is
so real and so powerful
that it will continue when your time on earth is over.

Why?
Because he loves you
and he wants to spend eternity with you.

Dad – red beans.

Picture

God loves you.
 He wants to keep you with him,
 not just a little while longer,
 but forever.

It's all good then, right?

No, it's not all good
 because we have a problem.
 It's something we Methodists don't talk about much.
 It's kind of a secret.

Family sometime have secrets.
 Uncle John's womanizing.
 Cousin Sue's drinking.
 My grandmother – Annie Pearl Eidom –
 great, godly woman.
 I was a teenager before I learned about her divorce.
 I never learned much about it.
 My mother was born in 1928,
 so it happened before then.
 I don't know when or why.
 It was a family secret that one day I stumbled upon
 but nobody talked about it.

And that's how it is with our problem.
 It's kind of a family secret for us Methodists.
 It's there but we don't talk about it
 and we act like it never happened
 or like it's not a big deal.

Want to know what it is?
 It's this –
 we're sinners.
 And believe it or not,
 that's a very big deal.

That leads to the second truth I want to share with you.

2. SIN HAS SEPARATED US FROM THE GOD WHO LOVES US.

Romans 3.22b –23a: For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

What is sin?

The Bible uses all kinds of words and images to describe sin.

One Greek word for sin in the Bible means

A. Missing the mark

It's failing to hit the target.

It's falling short of the goal.

It's any act or thought that fails to meet God's standard.

Another word for sin contains the idea of

B. Trespassing

Going where we shouldn't go.

Morally moving beyond the limits God has set for us.

Another word,

and this is the root of all our sins, means

C. Rebelling

Defying God's rightful claims on our lives.

Rejecting his Lordship over our lives.

This is expressed well in

Isaiah 1.2: Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."

Sin is not just an act we commit.

It's not just a failure to perform,

a missing of the target, or

a wandering into a moral place we shouldn't go.

Beneath our sins

is an attitude of rebelling that tells God:

You're not the boss of me.

It's an attitude that says,
 I am the Lord my God and I shall have not other gods before me.
 I'll follow the ways of Yahweh when I desire.
 I'll go my own way when I choose.
 But I am the ruler of my life
 and I will run it as I will.

And who has sinned?
 What does Romans 3.22-23 say?

Everyone has sinned.
 I have.
 You have.
 We all fall short.

What does sin do to us?

It separates us from God.

Isaiah 59.1-2: Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you.

That a truth the Bible teaches us from the very beginning.

Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden.
 They are in relationship with God.
 But then they sin.

And what happens –
 they are removed from the garden.
 That place where God's presence is,
 where they are in connection with him,
 they are sent away from the Garden.
 Why?
 Because sin separates us from God.

And the result of sin is what?

Spiritual death.

Romans 6.23: For the wages of sin is death.

Sin separates us from God who is the source of life.
 We don't have life within ourselves.
 Our life comes from God.

Connected to him we live,
 we have life abundant in this world
 and life eternal in the world to come.

But separated from God we die.
 First, spiritually.
 Later, physically.
 And then, if our sin problem is not corrected,
 if our spirits are not reconnected with God,
 ultimately we die eternally.

C. S. Lewis gets it just right.

C. S. Lewis: Good things as well as bad are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to or even into, the thing that has them. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?

We don't like admitting that we are sinners
 and we really hate admitting that we have sinned grievously enough
 that we are worthy of judgment.
 So we do all kinds of things to avoid that reality.

Some of us

1. We minimize our sin.

We tell ourselves that basically we're good people.
 Yes, we've done some wrong things along the way,
 but we'll be ok because
 we haven't committed any big sins.

2. We compare ourselves to others.

We tell ourselves that we'll be ok because we're not as bad as many
 people;

in fact, we're better than most.

We haven't done any of the things that make you a really bad person.

We haven't murdered anyone.

We haven't ever sold drugs.

We haven't stolen our kids' social security numbers
and gotten credit cards in their names.

Funny – when people try to convince themselves that they'll be ok
by comparing themselves to others,
they compare themselves to murders and drug dealers and
people who cheat on their taxes or their wives.

They don't ever compare themselves to Mother Teresa or Billy Graham.

They don't ever compare themselves to Jesus and say,
“yeah, I'm pretty close, I think I'll be all right.”

I take that back.

Mike Tyson did compare himself to Mother Teresa when he was applying to
have his boxing license restored after being convicted and serving time
for rape.

Mike Tyson: I'm not Mother Teresa, but I'm not Charles Manson either.

I'm not a saint.

But I'm not a mass murderer.

I'm right there in the middle with everybody else.

I should be fine.

And that's what we do.

Maybe we're not perfect,
but we'll be ok because we're not all that bad.

In fact, we're better than a lot of people,
maybe most people.

3. We turn to our good deeds.

We admit we've done some wrong,
but we add up all the good we've done.

And certainly the good we've done
far outweighs whatever sins we may have committed.

So, on balance we should be fine.

Know someone who thinks this way?
 Former New York City Mayor
 Michael Bloomberg.

Michael Bloomberg: I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close."

You may not state it in such an arrogant, offensive manner.
 But if you think you've done enough good to merit heaven.
 If you think that for all have sinned doesn't apply to you.
 If you believe that the wages of sin may be death for others,
 but not for you.
 If you believe that you have lived such a meritorious life
 that God somehow owes you heaven
 and that he will not judge your sin,
 then you have no concept of
 the holiness of God and
 his hatred of sin.

And I cannot sufficiently convey to you
 what danger you are in of being lost from God forever.

So, Rob, you're saying that you think I'm a terrible sinner?
 Noooo.
 I don't think you're a terrible sinner.
 I think you're a terrific sinner.
 I think you're so good at it
 that most of the time you sin and you don't even know it.

Thoughts, words, actions, motives.
 When it comes to sinning,
 you are a natural.

And what you need to know is that
 God will not and cannot overlook our sin.
 God is holy.
 He loves all that is good
 and he is offended by all that is evil.
 And he cannot be neutral about sin;

he cannot treat our sin as no big deal
without denying his very character.

And he cannot act as if our sins don't matter
without acting as if we don't matter.

When we do wrong,
we don't want God to hold us accountable.
At least a part of us doesn't.
But there's something worse than God holding us accountable.
Much worse.
And that's for God not to hold us accountable.

Richard John Neuhaus: We could not bear to live in a world where wrong is taken lightly and where right and wrong finally make no difference. Spare me a gospel of easy love that makes of my life a thing without consequence. Atonement is not an accountant's trick. It is not a kindly overlooking; it is not a "not counting" of what must count if anything in heaven or on earth is to matter. God could not simply decide not to count without declaring that we do not count.

Actions have consequences.
What we do matters.
It's part of what makes us matter.

It's being accountable
that makes us count.

So our sins must be dealt with
if we are to be reconnected to God
and have life.
And what does not work
is denying our sin,
minimizing our sin,
trying to pay for our sins through our good deeds or
convincing ourselves that we're not as bad as others.

My conversion.

Third truth.

3. GOD HAS MADE A WAY FOR US TO BECOME RIGHT WITH HIM.

Romans 3.23b-25: For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, by his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin through faith in his blood.

How does God make us right with himself?

It says:

Yet God by his grace makes us right in his sight.

What is Grace?

A simple, technical definition is: unmerited divine favor.

God shows us favor that we do not deserve.

Here's another way to remember what grace is.

Grace is

God's

Riches

At

Christ's

Expense

God's riches –

that forgiveness, that the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, salvation, eternal life.

God's riches

at Christ's expense –

God's riches made possible by the price that Jesus paid for us
by giving his life on the cross.

What Paul refers to as in the passage we just read

as Jesus being the sacrifice for our sins through the shedding of his blood on the cross.

You and I have to decide –

who do we look to for salvation?

Jesus or ourselves?

Is our confidence before God based on our merit or his mercy?

For salvation will we lean on our goodness or God's grace?
 Will we take hope because of what we have done for him or
 solely on what he has done for us?

Joke – JR Johnson
 Same joke

Started off by asking you,
 Why should God allow you into heaven?

When I leave this world
 and I stand before God,
 like Wally did,
 like you one day will –
 when I stand before God and he reviews my life
 and my sins are displayed
 and I see them in the searing light of his holiness –
 there in the presence of God
 when the weight of my rebellion against him becomes overwhelming
 and the immense ugliness of
 my pride and my lust and my greed
 and all the times I hurt others because of my self-centeredness
 rips into my heart with shame and guilt,
 and God says,
 Now, why should I let you into heaven,
 I am going to search the halls of heaven
 until I find Jesus,
 the lamb of God who was sacrificed for my sins,
 and I am going to say,
 Why should you let me into heaven –
 because of him,
 because of Jesus.
 And if that's not the right answer
 I will be lost forever
 because I know that I am no savior
 and I know that my sins are deserving of judgment.

This leads to the last think I want to tell you

4. WE RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE THROUGH FAITH.

We are saved by God's grace
 and we receive that grace through faith.

Romans 3.22: We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.

What is faith?

A decision to stop trusting in ourselves and start trusting in God.

Faith is simply the biblical word for trust.

It's when you trust something or someone enough
that you are willing to act on that belief.

And that's what faith is.

A decision to trust God's grace.

Not your good deeds.

Not God's grace and your good deeds.

But God's grace and nothing else.

Watchman Nee – drowning man

A WAY HAS BEEN MADE FOR US TO BECOME RIGHT WITH GOD

John 14.6: I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.

Revelation 3.20: Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me.

John 17.3: Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.