

Punishment & Freedom

Introduction

For the past few weeks we have been following the events of the Passion with our Easter Devotional Crucified/Glorified. On Sunday we reflect by taking a looking at one snapshot of that week. One particular moment in the Passion—a picture, if you will. A picture worth more than a thousand words.

Our first picture was that of the triumphal entry and we talked about Pain and Glory

The we took a look at the anointed of Jesus at Bethany and we discussed giving with the ideas Prepare and Watch

Last week our picture was that of the last supper in the upper room as Jesus announced that one of his very own disciples would betray him. They all denied it and we examined our hearts with the thought Guilt and Innocence.

This morning we turn our gaze upon the garden of Gethsemane at the moment of Jesus Arrest as we Punishment and Freedom

KEY TEXT

Mark 14:41-51 New International Version (NIV)

⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Jesus Arrested

⁴³ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

⁴⁸ “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” ⁵⁰ Then everyone deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him,

Picture a shipping dock in the dead of night. Fog fills the air. A criminal stands there, surrounded by shipping containers. Some are open, others closed. All of them are rusted. Then he hears it. The sound of footsteps. Slow. Deliberate. He starts to run. He darts down one row and then crosses over into another. He considers hiding in a container—until he hears a voice. It sounds close—a little too close for comfort. **“You can run, but you can’t hide.”**

That phrase, “You can run, but you can’t hide,” is a favorite in movies. It was originally used by a champion boxer (Joe Louis) to describe his opponent (Billy Conn) in their rematch fight in 1946 - the phrase highlights that any attempt at escape is futile. It doesn't have to be a boxer, dancing around a ring to avoid his opponent's left hook. It could be a person stepping onto the subway, jumping onto a bike, diving into a river, running into the woods. When someone runs from punishment, the law of entertainment says, “You can run, but you can’t hide.” So, we watch until the subway tunnel stops, the bike path ends, the swimmer surfaces, or the forest clears. And there will be our person, out of breath and soon out of life. “You can run, but you can’t hide.”

This law of entertainment is great for the movies but distressing in real life. Our crime doesn't have to be dramatic. It could be mundane. Gossip shared among friends. A shortcut we took to get the job done. A lie we told to get someone off our back.

People start putting pieces together and we start to run. We try one thing after another to hide from our sin, but at some point, it is out in the open. What we did in the darkness is exposed to the light. **And we realize that this is more than a law of entertainment—it is the Law of God.** You can run, but you can't hide. Not from God. Sin will lead to punishment. Which is why it is so important for us to meditate today on this one scene from

the ministry of Jesus: the Garden of Gethsemane. **Here, we learn the difference between running from punishment and following Jesus into freedom.**

Getting to the Heart

If you have been reading along in the *Crucified. Glorified.* prayer journal, you will remember last week's readings that considered the night when Jesus was betrayed. For us, it looks like a typical movie scene. The Garden of Gethsemane is dark and isolated. Jesus is praying. His disciples are sleeping. Suddenly you hear a sound. Torches appear, and in the flickering light, you see faces. Judas. Jesus. Only unlike the movies, Jesus stands there. He does not run. He does not hide. He stands there to be betrayed by Judas.

Behind him, his disciples scatter. Jesus had predicted this would happen. Earlier, he said as much to his disciples:

“You will all fall away. . . . For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

Matthew 26:31

While the Shepherd stands there and is betrayed, the disciples run and try to hide.

The scene is familiar. If not to you, then certainly to God. This is how humans have acted since the fall in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they knew they had sinned. They saw themselves. They were naked and afraid. And so, they ran:

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Genesis 3:8

They could run, but they couldn't hide.

How good are you at running and hiding? What ways are you avoiding God and his will for your life?

For the disciples, running away was how they would save their lives.

Rather than die with Jesus, they would live without him. They put a distance between them and their Savior. In our lives, we try not to make it as dramatic as that. We want to live with Jesus, but we also want to run away from confessing our sin.

How do we run? We put distance between ourselves and God.

Rather than face the difficulty of admitting our error and working through the consequences of it, it is easier to run away. We hide from sins we have done

The problem with all of this distance is not just the sin that we do and the good that we don't do. It's the gap that exists between us and God. That gap **will not** last forever, though, because God has a way of seeking out his people. You can run, but you can't hide.

When God came to the Garden of Eden, he knew that Adam and Eve had sinned. He knew that they were hiding in the midst of the Garden, and yet he sought them. He came looking for them and called out to them.

Genesis 3:9 New International Version (NIV)

⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

I'd like you to think about that for a moment. Why would God call out to Adam and Eve?

Our first thought is punishment. But actually, there is something more. Have you ever caught your kids doing something you explicitly told them not to do? A father tells his son not to raid the cookie jar. Then he comes into the kitchen and sees it: the chair is by the counter, the cookie jar is open, and his son is sitting

on the floor enjoying a treat. Rather than fly into a rage, the father asks his son, "What are you doing?" Why does he ask? He already knows the answer. It's obvious what his son is doing! But he asks anyway.

The father knows that love begins in relationships. In that moment when the son confesses and the father forgives, there is love. And so, the father patiently stands there in the doorway and tries to have a conversation with his son.

In the Garden of Eden, God patiently stands there and calls out to Adam and Eve. He wants to establish a relationship with them once again. A relationship of love. Yes, this involves a confession of their sin, but it also involves a promise of forgiveness. God desires to know his creatures by coming to them, being with them, talking to them about their sin, and offering them his salvation.

Genesis 3:9-21 New International Version (NIV)

⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, **“Where are you?”**

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, **“What is this you have done?”**

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring^[a] and hers;
he will crush^[b] your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labor you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.”

¹⁷ To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

²⁰ Adam^[c] named his wife Eve,^[d] because she would become the mother of all the
living.

²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

Notice God doesn't tell them what they have to do to fix this situation, because they can't. He asks them the questions so that they can recognize their sin and understand it's consequences and so that He can restore their desire for relationship with Him wherein is there only hope for salvation.

This is the reason Jesus does not run in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is faced with a choice. He can run like his disciples or he can stand there and be betrayed. He chooses to be betrayed. Why?

Because he has come to bring salvation. Just as God once came in the Garden of Eden, so Jesus now comes in the Garden of Gethsemane to begin a new relationship with his people. As John writes,

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17).

Jesus will do this not just by talking with us about our sin but by taking our punishment on himself.

We run from our sin and hide from God, hoping to be free from its punishment. Jesus does the opposite. He runs to us in the midst of our sin and stands there to bear its punishment. This is what Jesus is doing in the

Garden. When his disciples scatter like sheep, he stands there like a shepherd. A Shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep.

In the Kingdom of God, all sin leads to punishment. You can run, but ultimately, you can't hide. But Jesus comes to bear the punishment of God for you. He stands there to be delivered into the hands of sinners. He is led to crucifixion and dies under the wrath of God on the cross. But then Jesus will rise, and like a shepherd, he will lead you. **Jesus will lead you into freedom.** The freedom of being a child of God. Your life of running will end, and you will be invited into a lifetime of following—following Jesus and living out God's will in God's world.

Because of Jesus, we no longer need to run and hide. He has taken our punishment and given us freedom. Now we can rise and follow him.

Taking It Home

What does it mean to follow this Jesus? **It means to live in two kinds of freedom.**

First, there is freedom from punishment. Rather than run away from our sin, we confess it to God. John writes,

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9).

In Genesis 3:8–13, we read the first conversation God has with Adam and Eve after they have sinned. Rather than tell them what he already knows, God invites Adam and Eve to confess to him what they have done. They can run from God, but they cannot hide.

For Adam and Eve, confession of sin is difficult. **They confess what they have done, but only with qualifications.** In essence, they say to God, “Yes . . . but . . .” What are the qualifications that Adam and Eve offer to God? How is this another way of trying to hide from God?

What difficulties do you have in confessing your sins to God? to other people? What kinds of qualifications do you want to make?

A lot of people think that the Church is full of hypocrites, people who think that they don't sin or that they are better than others. God's

people, however, live by confessing their sins. They don't deny them or deceive others about them.

Instead, we know that Jesus Christ has suffered the punishment for our sins and therefore we confess our sins to Jesus and live in the freedom from punishment for the wrong that we have done.

But following Jesus is about more than freedom from punishment. It is also about freedom for good. If the Church were only about freedom from punishment, imagine the kind of people that Christians would be. They could go out into the world and do any kind of evil they wanted and then come before God, confess it, and be free from punishment. Freedom from punishment could lead to all sorts of evil.

This is what Paul is arguing against in his letter to the church at Rome. He writes,

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”

(Romans 6:1).

That is, are we to be people who continually go out into the world and sin because God forgives us all our wrongdoings? Paul answers,

By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:2-4

Newness of life—that is the second kind of freedom we live in. First, there is freedom from punishment, and second, there is freedom for good. Forgiven of our sins, we no longer run and hide. Instead, we rise and follow. We follow Jesus. We do the good works that Jesus would have us do. Rather than avoid the man, beaten up and left for dead on the side of the road, we come close to him and care for him. We share with the world the love of God that we have come to know in Jesus.

Because Jesus has come to take our punishment and to give us freedom in him, we no longer need to run and hide. Instead, we rise and follow. We are free to serve Jesus in many different ways in the world. In a world where people run and hide, we rise and follow Jesus.