

The Remedy for Our Disease

I Peter 2:21-24

1) This is the third message in the series on basic Christian beliefs. In the first, we began with God. Where else is there to begin?

- We begin with God who has a heart of love like a Father.
- In the second message, we saw that God created lavishly out of love. He made a perfect world and placed man in a perfect environment in the garden.

This perfect environment has been marred by man's disobedience and rebellion against God. Creation has been corrupted. Because of man's rebellion, sin entered our world. Our world is corrupted by sin and depravity, but against that awful backdrop, we ended last Sunday with the good news of the Gospel, which is:

- In spite of our sin, God loves us and has sent Jesus Christ to save us.
- God cares so much for you and me that His Son Jesus Christ was willing to lay down His life for us.
- In Christ, sin is cancelled, and we are made new creatures.

That's good news.

2) John Wesley said that he wanted to know one thing – how to get to heaven. It only makes sense that if there is a God who loves us; desires to have fellowship with us; and is preparing a place in heaven for us – we should want to know this God. The remedy for our disease cannot be overcome by our self-help methods or ethical virtues. Sin can only be cured and overcome by the Cross of Jesus Christ. In the Cross of Christ the way to heaven has been revealed, and that Cross is the guarantee of eternal life.

It is no wonder that so many of our Christian songs and hymns revolve around the subject of the Cross.

"Lift High the Cross"

"At Calvary"

"Am I a Soldier of the Cross?"

"Down at the Cross Where My Savior Died"

"The Old Rugged Cross"

"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"

"Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

"At the Cross"

3) In 1825, Sir John Bowring was shipwrecked in a terrible storm. While hanging onto the wreckage of his ship in the angry sea, sure to die, he caught sight of a cross. The near-death rescue that followed was so dramatic, John Bowring wrote several lines of poetry, expressing his gratitude to God for saving his life. Someone later put music to those words, and for over a hundred and fifty years we've been singing the words we sang just a moment ago:

*In the cross of Christ I glory,
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.*

4) That cross which led to Bowring's rescue from the sea has led to our rescue from sin. But we need to understand that it isn't the cross itself that we honor. It isn't those original crossbeams, those rugged, blood-soaked pieces of timber that stood on Golgotha that we honor. It is not the actual wood and nails. It is the One who hung on it whom we honor.

- I'm often intrigued by how many people wear the cross as a piece of jewelry. I received a copy of Sports Illustrated some time ago with a picture of Barry Bonds on the cover, and hanging off one ear lobe was a cross. I wondered, "Was Barry a believer?" I hadn't heard that he was, and if he were, he surely would be one of the surliest believers ever. Apparently, Barry just enjoys wearing the cross as a piece of jewelry.
- I have worn a cross that was given to me at the completion of my Walk to Emmaus about 22 years ago. I lost it the other day. The chain must have worn through, and it fell off. I feel lost without it. But if you don't know what the Cross represents, you might as well wear a miniature electric chair and a golden hangman's noose.

5) The Cross itself is a piece of wood. It is a symbol of torture. It is the Savior who died on that Cross and lives on that gives it the meaning it has for us who believe.

- The redemption Jesus provided on that Cross continues to be significant and effective today. But it is Jesus who is our glory and the object of our adoration.
- When we sing about the Cross, it is what the Cross represents. It was there our Substitute died in our place, providing the remedy for our spiritual disease.

a. To many there is something illogical about this. It is even offensive to them. They say, "How can the death of Jesus 2,000 years ago have

any effect upon us today?" They simply do not believe they are sinners, or at least so bad that Someone had to die in their place. The whole idea is repulsive to them.

b. Actually, nothing has changed. It was that way in the first century. The Apostle Paul said,

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (I Corinthians 1:18)

c. Undoubtedly, as long as the world stands, there will be a thousand objections to this biblical doctrine. For still, the preaching of Christ crucified will be foolishness to the wise men of the world.

6) What is the message of the Cross?

- It is a dramatic reminder that the world is sinful and separated from God. Our society may continue to ignore or even redefine sin. It may even erase the word from the language of sophisticated people. But as long as one cross stands atop just one church steeple, it will be a reminder that mankind is hopelessly sinful and in need of a salvation which only God can provide.
- The Cross shatters once and for all any notion that God is against us, unconcerned about us, or absent from us. On the contrary, God stepped into human history to demonstrate His love and to offer each of us an alternative to sin and death. Because of the Cross, no one need ever live one day without having the knowledge of being loved –for time and eternity.

7) But why was it necessary for that terrible death to occur?

a. Hundreds of years before Christ, the Prophet Isaiah gave us the reason.

"He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." (Isaiah 53:5-6)

b. The Apostle Peter echoes this same thought in his first letter.

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." (I Peter 2:24)

8) When Jesus died on that Cross, He cried out,
"It is finished!" (John 19:30)

a. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God was once for all. Christ never again has to die. The payment of the Cross satisfied the Father's demands against sin. How do we know? He raised His Son from the grave. He brought Him back from death. The resurrection was God's "Amen" to Christ's, "It is finished."

b. The Apostle Paul declares about this,
"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."
(II Corinthians 5:21)

God the Father took the sins of all mankind and placed them on Jesus, and Jesus took all our sin and guilt at the Cross and cleared our debt. The work of salvation is finished. It is provided for you and me, if we will simply come to Christ.

c. The personal message in all of this is that if God is satisfied with the death of His Son, and if we are in Christ, He is satisfied with us. We don't have to live under the demanding enslavement of working, begging, pleading, fearing, bargaining, or paying penance to find favor with God. In Christ, the Christian is as safe and secure as the Son before the Father.

9) That's a great thing. Salvation is a wonderful gift. It is a blessed comfort to know that we are going to heaven. But we aren't saved to lay around in a hot tub until God takes us there. Jesus said something to us about a cross. He said,

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

a. To follow Him requires more than just a decision; it requires a definite action on our part. Commitment to Christ means to take up our cross daily, giving up our hopes, dreams, possessions, even our very life if need be for the cause of Christ.

We do not deny ourselves for the sake of self-denial. We take up a cross that claims us and we follow Jesus. We take up a commitment for which we decide that we will live and die. We give ourselves to something. We give ourselves to Christ. Only if we willingly take up our cross may we be called His disciple.

b. I heard a story recently about a little girl who went to visit her grandmother. Her grandmother was an old fashioned strict Methodist. When they came home from church on Sunday afternoon, the little girl turned the TV on. Her grandmother said, "We don't watch TV on Sundays." The little girl picked up a deck of cards and began to play solitaire, but her grandmother said, "We don't play cards on Sundays." The little girl went outside and the neighbor's Bassett hound came over. She took one look at those sad Bassett features and said, "You must be a Methodist, too."

c. The devil wants you to believe that following after Christ is the saddest, most miserable life imaginable. No one who has followed Christ would deny that you have given up some things to follow Christ, but the rewards far exceed anything you have given up.

But you ask, "Didn't Christ's path lead Him to crucifixion?"

Yes. But the crucifixion became a privileged experience of triumph and eternal blessing, not only to Christ, but to the whole world and to every individual in it. The way of Christ holds the power to turn

- every adversity into glory,
- every defeat into victory,
- every misfortune into power.

It is the road of love so perfect that the will of the Father is brought forth in its triumphant glory, when the mortal 'self' is crucified. This divine way of Christ is the way that fulfills all things, glorifies, and exalts all things.

No wonder Sir John Bowring could write, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory."