

Ash Wednesday

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:21

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Theme: A Wounded Savior for a Wounded People

There are two kinds of wounds that we can bear, one of them is very easy to see. They are the physical wounds. In Lent we often consider those wounds of Jesus. The crown of thorns pierced His head. His back was ripped with the many lashings. His hands and feet were pierced when they nailed Him to the cross. After he died, a spear was thrust into His side.

However, Jesus bore other wounds. They were the ones that you could not see. He was betrayed, denied, mocked, and abandoned. These wounds might have been greater than the ones that could be seen because they went right down to His soul. It was especially those wounds that brought about our salvation. Tonight as we begin this season of lent, I would like to look at Christ as the wounded Savior for a wounded people.

I. Lent shows us just how wounded we are.

It shows God's judgement for sin. We are tempted to take our sins lightly. We want to excuse them, saying, "Well, that's just how I am." We like to compare our sins with those of people whom we consider to be worse than us. We look for excuses for the sins that we do. Sin is not something that we like to talk about today, and when we talk about it, we often think that it is not such a big deal. It is something that we can master. I recently read a little booklet on why people go to Jesus. One of the paragraphs stated, "**Jesus tells us that we are better than we think we are. Jesus tells you that you are positively wonderful. You are a child of God! And He tells you that you should not be a sinful, mean, vindictive, prejudiced or fearful person. He tells you not to be that way, because that isn't the way we were meant to be. He tells you that you can be anything you will yourself to be...**"¹ In that view, sin is a minor character flaw that we can overcome. In that case we don't come to Jesus so that He can take our sin away. We come to Him for encouragement that we can change from our sinful ways.

But when you consider what the Bible says about sin, it is clear that it is more than a minor character flaw. Our entire nature has become sinful. That leads to sinful thought, words, and deeds. The worst thing of all is that there is nothing that we can do to free ourselves from our sin. Jesus had to become sin for us. He had to be wounded in our place. Our sins were laid on Him on the cross. The only way that we could be freed from them was if the sinless Lamb of God would bear them in our place.

We see just how devastating sin is by its effects in our lives. We get a glimpse of that in our own lives. We bear the burden of guilt. There can be whole periods of our lives that we would rather forget because of the things that we did at that time. We look at how we have treated our family, and we wonder how we could have done that. We could each bear a tremendous burden of guilt for the things that we have said and done to those around us. We also bear the effects of sin. There are people who have betrayed us. Others have mocked us and made fun of us in our weakness. Like Job someone might have told us that we deserved it in our time of

¹*How to Make Jesus Your Best Friend*, Norman Vincent Peale, page 5

deepest suffering. Then there are the things that we just cannot explain. The sickness that suddenly comes. The child that is sick from birth. The accident that changes our entire life. A job that is lost. The sudden death of a loved one. God didn't plan any of these things in the beginning. They are all a result of the sin that we have brought into the world.

We especially see the devastating effects of sin when we consider Christ's suffering this Lenten season. As He bore our sins, he suffered more than any of us ever will. The people who praised Him on Palm Sunday shouted for His death on Friday. His closest friends all ran away. He was betrayed by one of His own. Everyone mocked Him, even those who were being crucified with Him. As His Father saw all of our sins laid on Him, He turned His back on Him. He died in pain and agony. His suffering is what we deserved. It shows just how wounded we are.

II. But Christ's wounds especially show us God's love.

It was by those wounds that Christ made His righteousness available to us. Christ loved us so much that He willingly gave His life on the cross for our salvation. No one took His life from Him. No one made Him suffer. He willingly suffered and died for us. He allowed Himself to be wounded in our place. He bore our wounds so that we could exchange our sin for His righteousness. He was wounded in our place, so that we could be righteous and live in His glory. That is His great love for us.

It is those wounds that heal us. We don't come to Him so that He can tell us how good we look when in reality we are wounded. He gave His life that our wounds can be healed. We often speak of Lent as a season of repentance. Literally the word for "repent" means to turn. We often think of how we turn *from* our sins during this time of year, but it is important that we also realize that we turn *to* Christ. In today's Old Testament lesson Joel told the people to return to the Lord their God. When we repent of our sins, we confess them and have no desire to live in them any longer, and we turn to Christ where we find righteousness. We come to Him for the forgiveness of our sins. He cleanses us from them and makes us righteous and pure. Yes, we still have that sinful nature which still desires nothing good. Far too often we fall into sin, but in His mercy God still wants us to turn to Him. Christ was wounded for those sins too. He wants to heal us from them all. When we suffer the effects of sin in this world, we also know that they cannot separate us from God's love in Christ. If He loved us so much to be wounded like us, He will be with us and defend us from every evil of body and soul. Eventually death will come to all of us, but when it does, Christ's wound of death, will save us from our death. It will be the entrance into His eternal glory. We can be sure of it because Christ has clothed us with His righteousness.

"God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us." That verse makes it clear that Christ was wounded for us. It shows the severity of sin, but also God's love, that He was wounded for us. The second half is even more wonderful, "so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." We are beautiful in God's eyes, but only in Christ. He has taken away the wounds of our sin by bearing them Himself and clothing us with His righteousness. We cannot help but thank Him for such great love and mercy. Amen.

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