

This Week at the Creek

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Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

Nothing but the Blood

Romans 5:12-19

January 27, 2008

When Cristy joined the Air Force, it was the first time she had ever flown in an airplane. She and other recruits were corralled off the planes and onto buses. There must have been fifty scared young women on her bus. Disembarking at their living quarters, they were given their luggage and told to stand at attention. A sergeant came out, yelled, "Pick up your bags!" and then yelled to set them back down. This cycle was repeated for about ten minutes. Finally the sergeant looked at Cristy and said, "Why couldn't the rest of you have been as smart as this young lady?" Cristy stood there with only her purse over her shoulder and no luggage. For the first and only time, she silently thanked the airline for losing her sixty-pound bag filled with everything but the kitchen sink.

Sin can be looked at in a lot of different ways. One of those ways is as **baggage**; how heavy it is depends on how much sin you've packed away in your past. But another way is to look at it is as **plaque**. Plaque is defined by *American Heritage Dictionary* as "a film of mucus and bacteria on a tooth surface" as well as "a deposit of fatty material on the inner lining of an arterial wall, characteristic of arteriosclerosis." Whether plaque is happening to your teeth or to your arterial wall, it slowly accumulates, building up over time, bit by bit damaging the function of your teeth or your arteries.

On your teeth, plaque is the cornerstone on which a whole host of disgusting oral hygiene and dental problems are built on. In your arteries, plaque increases with our intake of fatty foods, and over time this sticky, fatty substance builds up in the lining of the blood vessels—kind of like corrosion in a water pipe—until the vessel either bursts or clogs up often causing a stroke.

Sin can work the same way in our lives. Already present at birth, sin also slowly accumulates, building up over time, bit by bit damaging the function of

the lives God has given us to live. And because it does, we need a Savior to save us from ourselves – to, in essence, scrape the plaque off our hearts and spirits.

But maybe at this point you're still wondering how it is that we can be declared guilty for something Adam did thousands of years ago? Many people I've talked to feel that it isn't fair for God to judge us because of Adam's sin. And yet that's not really the point. The fact is that each of us confirms our heritage with Adam by our own sins! We take off in life headlong following in his footsteps! We have the same sinful nature – the same tendency to sin – and we're just as prone to rebel against God. And so it is that we're judged for the sins that we commit. But if and when we ever come around to understanding that, we'll realize that because we're sinners, it isn't **fairness** that we need or even want; it's **mercy!**

To go even further, the apostle Paul showed in this passage that keeping the law doesn't bring salvation – and he added on that breaking the law isn't what brings death. Death is the result of Adam's sin and of the sins we all commit. Paul reminded his readers that for thousands of years the law hadn't been explicitly given, and yet people still died. The law was given first and foremost to show people the way God wants them to live, yes; but it was also given to help people see their sinfulness, to show them the seriousness of their offenses, as well as to drive them to God for mercy and pardon. For in the end, sin is the deep discrepancy between who **we are** and who we were created to be. The law points out our sin and places the responsibility for it squarely on our shoulders. But the law itself offers no actual remedy. So when we're convicted of sin, we must turn to God Himself for mercy and healing.

Now just as Adam was a representative of created humanity, so is Jesus Christ the representative of a new spiritual humanity. Every one of us is born into Adam's physical family – the family line that leads to certain death. Every one of us has reaped the results of Adam's sin. We've inherited his guilt, we've inherited that sinful nature, and therefore, we've inherited God's punishment. However, because of Jesus we can actually trade in judgment for forgiveness! Christ offers us the grand opportunity to be born into His spiritual family – the family line that is initiated by His forgiveness and leads to eternal life. If we do nothing, we get justice, which is death through Adam. But if we come to God by faith, we get grace, which is eternal life through Jesus. What an incredible promise this is to those who love Christ! We can triumph over sin's power and death's threats through the power of Jesus Christ.

But that triumph starts with our recognition of our own **sinfulness** – of our own **falling short** of how God intended for us to live. And of course, that's part of our nature that we have to overcome – that pride that doesn't like to admit our shortcomings. And in some ways, that pride has installed itself in the church. Beginning especially about a century ago, the church began to dwell a bit less on human failings and limitations than on human capabilities and possibilities – which was in part a good thing. But over time we got more

positive than was reasonable. Our sermons and teaching began appealing more to the basic goodness in people, to our ability to reasonably and rationally and compassionately think our way through the thickets confronting the human race. And because of that overly optimistic assessment of human nature, we've been ill prepared for all that we've seen happen: holocausts and world wars and racial prejudice and ethnic cleansings and exploding murder rates and acts of terrorism – not to mention the greed and power that around the globe extends its reach over the poor and oppressed. How could any of us foresee these kinds of events that would so claw away at our belief in our innate human goodness and leave it shredded beyond recognition?

It's gotten so bad that we've almost reached the point of being numbed to the wickedness and death that's constantly stalking our world. We watch the increasingly graphic and violent evening news each night, calmly chowing down our dinner while images of horror flicker in front of us in surround sound. Is there anyone out there who can look at the events of the past century and still make that claim that we're all good and getting better? If we were to look at the human race with any degree of realism, we'd be far less likely to claim our status as a little lower than the angels and far more likely to claim only to be a little higher than the devils! But that's not just cause for us to simply stop there. For even if we're being forced by the harsh realities of our world today to abandon the false doctrine of innate human goodness, it still remains the church's responsibility to offer people the truth of salvation for its sinfulness.

It's not enough for us to confess that we're a sinful, selfish, and short-lived people. There's no hope, no grace, no love in such a message. The whole of the biblical position is not just that people are rotten; it's also that through the mercy and grace and love of our God, we can be justified and brought to new life through the cross of Jesus Christ. Yes, we need a Savior. Yes, the world needs a Savior. Yes, the planet needs a Savior to rescue it from human greed and selfishness.

So what can relieve us of such heavy baggage that is our past? So what can scrape away the plaque jamming up the arteries of our spirit? There's an old hymn that starts out by asking a couple of similar, critical questions: "What can wash away my sin?" and "What can make me whole again?" It was written by two men who had come to Christ at an early age. Robert Lowry, who wrote the words, came to Christ at age seventeen; William Doane confessed Christ as his Savior while in high school. Together they wrote a number of hymns and published several gospel songbooks. When "Nothing but the Blood" was published in 1876, the inscribed Scripture passage was from Hebrews 9:22 – "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." (Unfortunately, most hymnals omit Lowry's original final two stanzas: "Now by this I'll overcome / Now by this I'll reach my home / Glory! Glory! This I sing / All my praise for this I bring – nothing but the blood of Jesus.")

Decades ago, a missionary named John Paton tried to translate the New Testament into the indigenous language of the people to whom he was sent. During his study of the language, however, he discovered that there was no word for the English word "believe." As the missionary struggled over how to translate a language without any word for "believe," one of the natives dropped by and flung himself exhaustedly into a chair. Then he stretched out and rested his legs on another chair. Laying himself out full-length on the two chairs, he muttered some words about how good it felt to lean his whole weight on those chairs. Immediately, John Paton wrote down the word used for "lean one's whole weight on." He knew he had discovered the precise word for "believe."

Indeed, you should try it. Reread your Bible, and every time you come to the word "believe," insert instead "lean his whole weight on." For instance, here's John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever leans his whole weight on Him, should not perish but have eternal life."

Someone has said that the good news is that we're all bad. We need a Savior to save us from ourselves, to relieve us of our baggage, to scrape the plaque off our heart and spirit. We need a Savior we can lean our whole weight on. And we have one! Through the **transforming** power of Jesus Christ, we can be made **good!** Believe on Him. Believe in Him. Lean your whole weight on Him.

Let us pray: Lord, our world is in such desperate need of Your salvation; we are in such desperate need of Your salvation. Thank You for washing away our sin.

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