

Date: November 15, 2020

Series: Vision Sunday

Title: *Share the Cure*

Preacher: Mark Adams

Scripture: Romans 5:12, 15a, 17-21

Romans 5:12, 15a, 17-21

**12 - Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin. In this way death came to all people, because all sinned.**

**15 - But the gift is not like the trespass.**

**17 - For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace---and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one Man, Jesus Christ!**

**18 - Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.**

**19 - For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.**

**20 - Where sin increased, grace increased all the more,**

**21 - so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

As you know, everyone is talking about how HARD 2020 has been. And it HAS been difficult---so difficult that many have asked, "What is going on? What is wrong with this world?!" I mean, think of it:

- We are still in a Global pandemic. It looks like a second wave of the virus is building.
- We've had repeated hurricanes in the gulf and repeated forest fires in the west.
- In February a young man was murdered while jogging because of the color of his skin and that was just the beginning of a landslide of similar acts of racial injustice.
- We have endured an election so divisive it has turned Christians against each other.

I could go on talking about this very difficult year, but hasn't all that has happened made you want to ask, "What is going on?" I was speaking to one of our members who has been quarantined in her home since March and with all she's seen on the news she asked me, "Mark, is it ever going to get better?" I understand how she feels, many people are counting the days until 2020 ends, but they fear 2021 won't be much better.

Well, what IS going on? What IS wrong with this world?

Now, since we're still in pandemic mode, I suggest we look at our problems as if they were a disease. I'm going to put on a lab-coat to help get us in that mindset. Of course, I'm not a real doctor; I just play one on the Internet. But, I do KNOW a real doctor and he gave me a crash course in the basics of disease treatment. He says there are three steps.

### **1.) You begin with the DIAGNOSIS.**

And the first step in a diagnosis is to take a HISTORY. You not only ask the about the patient's complaint; sore throat, fever, whatever, and when their symptoms began, you ALSO ask the patient about their family; what illnesses they have suffered.

Well looking at our "patient's history"---looking at the WORLD'S history---shows us that the problems we have encountered this year are not new. For example, we've had global pandemics before, ones that were far worse than Covid-19.

- For example, the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918 lasted over two years. 500,000,000 people were infected, a quarter of the world's population at the time. Fifty million died in THAT

pandemic, almost 50 times as many as have perished in this one.

- And when it comes to the storms and forest fires, the natural disasters that have plagued us this year, they're not new either.  
I mean, there have been far more damaging hurricanes. We all remember Katrina, it caused over 1,800 deaths. But do you remember Hurricane Mitch? In 1998 it killed 19,000. And do you remember the Tsunami that hit southeast Asia in 2004? It killed nearly a quarter of a million people.
- What about the racial injustice we've seen this year? Sadly, it is not a new thing either. Africans were first enslaved and brought to America in 1619.  
So, racism in the US started at least four hundred years ago and quickly became systemic. When I use that word, I'm talking about treating people differently because of the color of their skin; an attitude that is woven into our systems, our culture, our customs, our laws. An example of systemic racism was SEGREGATION and it wasn't that long ago. Integration of schools in my home state of Delaware began when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I didn't really notice it at the time, but I can look back now and think, *"In 1<sup>st</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade everyone in my school was white. From sixth grade on, that was not the case."*  
The violence we have seen this year toward people of color is not new either. One example that stands out happened in 1921, when there was a racial massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma. White rioters rampaged through black neighborhoods killing people, burning their homes, and destroying their businesses. Some whites even used their private planes to drop firebombs and shoot from above. About ten thousand people of color were left homeless and property damage amounted to more than thirty-two million in today's dollars. The number killed or injured is estimated to be well over 100, but no one really knows because news of that massacre was totally squelched, omitted from local, state, and national histories. I only heard about it this year and I was surprised because I thought I had a good education---I guess not---which is another example of systemic racism.
- And Christians arguing about things like this election---sadly, that's not new either.  
In fact, believers have argued about politics and much less important things for a long time.  
The first time I attended the Southern Baptist Convention, there were arguments over whether or not Christians should use the Elvis stamp and about the "evils" of women wearing sequins in worship---I remember leaning over to the person next to me asking, *"What's a sequin?"*

So, one thing we need to understand as we seek to diagnose our world's problems is that a thorough "medical history" shows that these problems we've faced this year are NOT NEW---which tells us the CAUSE of those problems is not either.

This is important to understand in our diagnostic process because my doctor friend tells me that successful treatment and good prognosis is all about getting the diagnosis correct! Most errors in treating a disease stem from failing at the diagnosis stage, going down the wrong path. So, what is the right path? What is the CAUSE of all our problems? What is wrong with the world?

Well, with the Bible's help, I've done thousands and thousands and thousands of years-worth of CONTACT TRACING and that tracing reveals that the problems I have mentioned began with the first two people ever created---Adam and Eve. EVE is "Patient zero" but Adam wasn't far behind. The problems of this past year, the same kinds of problems mankind has always endured, started the day these first two people disobeyed God. So, all the things that make us ask *"What is wrong with this world?"* all that started AFTER these first two people broke God's one rule. Here's my diagnosis. We all suffer from what I will call: *"disobedience disease."*

That name is a little too obvious so, let's see, what shall we name it? I could follow the example of other researchers who named diseases they identified after themselves. I could call this "Mark's disease" but I didn't discover it, plus it's not just Mark's disease. It's Jim's disease and Sue's disease and Pedro's disease, and Patrick's disease and Pam's disease---we all have it.

I tell you what, to be current, let's call this disease "COVID-ONE." Don't misunderstand, it's not a virus, it's more of a genetic disorder because Adam and Eve passed it on to their children, who passed it on to their children, and their children, and their children---right on down to you and me. All of us are BORN infected.

As Romans 3:23 says, "**All have DISOBEYED God---all have sinned---all have 'COVID-ONE.'**"

Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, "**There is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.**"

David puts it this way in Psalm 51:5, "**Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**"

COVID-ONE. This disobedience disease, what the Bible calls "sin," is an inherited thing. It's like a break in our spiritual DNA and all the deformities of thought and behavior proceed from that mutation. We don't have to find a test center and get a nasal swab to see if we have it. It's OBVIOUS that we all do.

- Have you ever wondered why your cute little toddler screams at you when you tell him or her to do something they don't want to do?  
This week, my Granddaughter, Emma, learned a new word. Her mom told her it was time to go to bed. Emma refused, and Sarah said, "I'm your boss!" Emma responded, "No! I boss! I boss!" It's really hard not to laugh when she says that but it's not a laughing matter because it shows my 22-month old granddaughter is infected. She has COVID-ONE.
- Those of you with older children, have you ever wondered why your teenager seems to instinctively rebel against your loving authority?
- Have you ever wondered why leaders---from politicians to pastors---risk everything for a moment of pleasure or additional power?
- Have you ever been shocked to discover that a co-worker you thought was as straight as an arrow turns out to be a wife abuser?
- Have you ever wondered why you have an inner attraction to gambling or pornography or swearing?
- Have you ever wondered why you, a righteous Redlander, lose your temper when the Internet fails in the middle of a worship service---AGAIN?

Those are all symptoms of this disease, SIN, "COVID-ONE." As the old hymn puts it, we all have "sin-sick souls."

In his book, *Genesis in Time and Space*, Francis Schaeffer points out several ways this sin-sickness affects us in the forms of alienation that have resulted because of Adam and Eve's sin.

**a. First, there was PSYCHOLOGICAL separation; humans were separated from each other:**

Genesis 3:7 says, "**Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.**"

Up to this point, there was no shame, no guilt, but once Adam and Eve broke God's one rule, once they sinned, suddenly they didn't like themselves. They were ashamed. From then on, this genetic virus introduced all the psychological problems we see in the world today: low self-esteem, poor self-image, depression, anxiety---all of it.

**b. Then there was SPIRITUAL separation. Man was separated from God.**

The next verse says, "**The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'**" (Genesis 3:8ff)

Before sin, Adam and Eve felt comfortable in the presence of God. But now they felt uncomfortable with God. They felt guilty. His holiness put a spotlight on their sin. They couldn't stand that, so they hid.

This week I read about a pastor who phoned the home of some people who had recently visited his church, and a voice on the other end of the phone answered with a whispered "Hello." The pastor said, "Who is this?"

The whisperer said, "Jimmy."

The pastor said, "How old are you, Jimmy?"

"Four."

"Well, Jimmy, can I please speak to your mom?"

"She's busy."

"Well then, Jimmy, can I please speak to your dad?"

"He's busy."

"Jimmy, are there any other adults in your home?"

"Yes---the police are here."

"Can I speak to one of the police officers?"

"No--They're busy."

"Jimmy, who else is there?"

"Firemen."

"Well, Jimmy, can you put one of the firemen on the phone?"

"They're all busy."

"Well, Jimmy, what are they all busy doing?"

"They're busy looking for me."

Well, like Jimmy, like Adam and Eve, sin causes people to hide---hide from God. And all the spiritual estrangement that people feel today—the emptiness, dead-end searches down one religion after another, disrespect for the Bible, disinterest in church, dislike for righteous people—all that stems from when Adam and Eve brought sin into the world.

**c. Then Schaeffer points out there was a SOCIAL separation. Man was separated from his fellow man.**

***"And God said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?' The man said, 'The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate of it.'"***

(Genesis 3:12-13)

Adam took it like a man, didn't he?! He blamed his wife. He essentially said: *"I'm the victim here. She made me do it."* Well, all the social separation seen in marital strife, divorce, lawsuits, gossip, hatred, prejudices and war were all introduced to the world because of sin. All the sins of man against man came because of that act of disobedience.

**d. That was followed by ENVIRONMENTAL separation.**

In Genesis 3:17, God said to Adam: ***"Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field [by] the sweat of your brow."***

I mean this disease doesn't just affect people. The whole world is thrown off kilter because of it. Weeds and erosion, floods and droughts, volcanoes and earthquakes, hurricanes and tornadoes, bacteria and viruses, all were introduced because of sin. This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 9 when he says that all of creation is so sick it groans, longing to be redeemed, cured, HEALED by the Creator.

Okay, that's the DIAGNOSIS, "SIN DISEASE," "COVID-ONE." The next step is PROGNOSIS. And I hate to tell you, in fact, it's a good thing you're already sitting down because it doesn't look good.

**2.) You see, if untreated, the PROGNOSIS of "COVID-ONE" is always DEATH.**

In Genesis 3 God said that because of their disobedience, humans would, ***"return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN."***

Since that day, every person born has gone through an aging process where they move toward the day their aging bodies crumble to dust. And it is not fun is it?

I stand before you today very sore. Do you know why I'm sore? It's because I've been carrying my granddaughter around for a couple weeks. I love doing it, but I pay a price, especially when she claims to be the boss and wriggles around trying to get down when I'm trying to carry her to where she needs to go, like to take a nap or get a diaper change. 20 years ago, I could have carried her all day. Back then I could probably have JUGGLED grandkids with no pain. But not now. Twenty years ago, I could remember more names. Twenty years ago, I could run faster and further.

You know, I've been around death a lot in my line of work, almost as much as a real doctor and based on the Bible I can say that what happens AFTER Christians die is wonderful. But the death process itself is not. It's hard to age. It's painful. It's humiliating. Well, that's the way it is for COVID-ONE-infected people like you and me. As we read a moment ago, ***"Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin. In this way death came to all people, because all sinned."*** (Romans 5:12)

Do you understand what I'm saying? The most-deadly disease in the world today is not Ebola, it's not Cancer, it's not Covid-19, it's COVID-ONE. It's SIN-sickness because EVERYONE has it and it is ALWAYS terminal. Try as we might, there is nothing we can do to change that sad fact.

But don't despair, for there is a cure, there's only ONE. I mean, for COVID-19 it looks like there will be dozens of vaccines available around the world. But not for COVID-ONE, for SIN, there is only ONE cure---but it is 100% effective, and no insurance is required, there's no co-pay or deductible because Jesus paid the price. And that leads to the next step.

We've talked about the diagnosis, the prognosis, let' get to:

### **3.) The TREATMENT.**

As I said, the only treatment for COVID-ONE is Jesus. First Century physician, Dr. Luke writes, ***"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."*** (Acts 4:12) Now I need to stop and make sure you understand something. This disease is identified by our BEHAVIOR---our acts of selfishness and greed and prejudice and pride. But those are just the SYMPTOMS, the disease itself is an INNER thing. In Matthew 5, not A physician but THE GREAT physician Himself said, ***"From WITHIN come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make man 'unclean.'"***

So, the treatment for COVID-ONE has to be able to be able to touch our INSIDES.

And, many people don't understand this. A Barna Poll once revealed that half of all Americans believe if a person is generally good and does enough good things during their life they will earn a way to Heaven. In essence, they think they can cure themselves by adjusting their OUTWARD behavior. But that treatment won't work for a couple reasons.

First, on our own we can't consistently change our outward behavior. But second, and more importantly that treatment doesn't deal with our nature, our insides. It doesn't get to the root of the problem. The thing that CAUSES our outward behavior. I mean, COVID-ONE is not some "moral acne" that can be cured with better washing, the latest pimple cream or cover-stick. No, sin-sickness is an inherited badness in our nature that spreads throughout our system. Like a "spiritual cancer," it eats away at all that is still good about the image of God in us. It's why we do UN-Godly things.

So, the treatment---the cure---has to fix that. Well, Jesus has no infection. We know that because He never exhibited any of the symptoms. He NEVER sinned. He is 100% FREE of COVID-ONE, so He can cure us by taking our sin on Himself. His blood shed on the cross is like a spiritual antibody in that it can completely cleanse sin-sickness from our innermost parts out.

I can't help but think of a powerful scene from the movie, *The Green Mile*. John Coffey was on death row because of a crime he did not commit. John had a special power. He could absorb sickness from another person. The warden's wife had brain cancer and was dying, so John's guards took him out of the prison and brought him to the warden's home. They guided John up to the woman's bedroom where she was writhing in agony. John gently placed his mouth next to hers. The inside of her mouth began to glow and a swarm of bugs streamed out of her mouth and into John's. Then

John got up and the woman's face was peaceful and serene as you can see in these before and after pictures. The disease had completely left her body. She was healed. But John doubled over in pain and began to cough uncontrollably because he had taken her sickness on himself.

That's a picture---an illustration from fiction---of what really happened on the cross. As 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:21 says, **"God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."** On the cross Jesus took our sin on Himself so that if we ask Him we can be healed, cleansed of the sin that is killing us.

But that's not all Jesus does.

When we come to Him in faith, Jesus gives us a "heart transplant." This is what God is talking about in Ezekiel 36:26 when He says, **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."** So you see, Jesus doesn't just wipe away our sin and forgive every sinful thought and action we've ever done and ever will do, He also gives us a NEW insides, a new nature. As it says in Galatians 5:24, **"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."**

In 1983 Karla Faye Tucker helped to kill two people with a pickaxe, and she was so animalistic in her behavior that she laughed while she did it. She was found guilty, and imprisoned. On death row, her own green mile, Karla Faye Tucker became a born-again Christian, and all those close to her said, *"You can't question the legitimacy of her conversion experience. She's a new person."* She became active in the prison chapel, sharing the gospel with others. In 1998 Karla became the first woman executed in Texas since the Civil War era. But as she lay strapped on a gurney, she delivered her final message to those gathered to witness her execution. She said: *"I'm going to be face to face with Jesus now. I love all of you very much. I'll see you all when you get there."*

No matter how deep your sin, the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse it. No matter how inhuman your nature, the power of the Holy Spirit can transform it from bitterness to tenderness and faith.

This leads to the VISION for 2021. Next year, our focus as a church is going to be SHARING THE CURE for COVID-ONE. I know you're thinking. *"That's just a sneaky way to get us to focus on evangelism again."* Well, it's not sneaky. We ARE focusing on evangelism because that IS the cure and we are commanded to share it. And it is URGENT that we do so, far MORE urgent than getting the Covid-19 virus cure to people. Plus sharing it is the ONLY reason we are here and not in Heaven.

We've taken the word CURE and made it into an acronym:

**C**hrist

**U**nderstands

**R**edeems and

**E**mpowers

Say that with me: *"Christ Understands, Redeems, and Empowers."*

In the coming year, you are all going to be "licensed" as P.A.'s, Physicians Assistants---more accurately, you are going to be "G. P. A.'s," GREAT Physician Assistants. We're going to ask Jesus to EMPOWER us to UNDERSTAND what is wrong with this world, understand how and why people hurt and how important it is that we share the cure---the gospel message that Jesus came to cure us, REDEEM us. To remind you of our theme, we have a prescription bottle for each of you. Inside there is a prescription for you to share with someone who needs the cure.

And in a few weeks we'll have face masks like this for each of you to give you opportunities to share the CURE. This year we are also going to focus on applying the CURE---the GOSPEL message---to the other problems we have been experiencing; racism, marital strife, political divisions, financial strain and weakened church fellowship. I will share details later.

When doctors graduate from medical school they take the Hippocratic Oath and I want us as, GREAT PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANTS, to do something like that. If you commit to this repeat after me:

*"I will do my best---as empowered by Jesus---to share the cure.*

*I will work to lead others to be healed of their sin sickness by professing faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.*

*I will ask Jesus to empower me to be an agent of healing for all the damage sin causes, including racism and political discord.*

*I will work to revive our church fellowship and to help those who suffer from financial woes and family strife.*

*I will share the cure."*

LET US PRAY