

POINTS OF REFUGE

OPENING: "Lyin' Eyes" (The Eagles)

...City girls just seem to find out early
How to open doors with just a smile
A rich old man
And she won't have to worry
She'll dress up all in lace and go in style
Late at night a big old house gets lonely
I guess every point of refuge has its price...

SINFULNESS OF MAN

Glen Frey and Don Henley were founders of the band, the Eagles, one of the most popular of the 70's and beyond. They were talented musicians and songwriters, and in some cases revealed life in a way that makes perfect sense, as in the line, "Every point of refuge has its price".

The woman in the song thought she had a problem regarding her future, so she took refuge in a relationship with a much older rich man and a "big old house". A wrong relationship leading to an undesirable destiny.

Refuge

We all have points of refuge, places of escape or denial. And they all come with a price—they keep us from a right relationship with the right person for the destiny we desire.

I know a man my age who never achieved what he hoped to achieve in life, yet he was Mr. Everything in high school. His point of refuge against life's disappointments is the memory of his glory years in high school, in himself, and he continues to be self-centered, selfish and rather arrogant. The price for him is inability to see life as it is and make the best of it.

Our first ancestors had perfect fellowship and relationship with God, in a place of perfection, described as an abundant garden but disobeyed God's one warning, and found refuge with man made solutions—hiding behind fig leaves and trees. They tried to hide their bad decision that led to imperfection in their relationship with God--a poor choice of refuge in coverings and hiding places that God could easily see through, and the price was the resulting break in relationship between God and mankind since.

Restoration

And yet, God loved them enough to restore them to himself, substituting for them skins of animals for fig leaves and trees, and providing them refuge from their nakedness that revealed their sin. He could not tolerate sin in His presence. He required the sin to be covered, and He provided the covering, requiring a blood sacrifice that showed the depth of consequences of sin.

Even though they took refuge *from* God, they found refuge *in* God because of His love and provision for them. Whatever God expects of us that we can't make happen, He provides for us. He is the perfect point of refuge, and He paid the price for us.

Our own points of refuge are many and varied: seeking overachievement; in bad relationships; in addictive behaviors. You know yours and I know mine. All of them have their origin in breaking God's desire for our best, that is to say anything that varies from God's instructions for us.

As we learned earlier in life: Hot, don't touch; Look both ways before crossing; Be nice to each other—treat them like we want to be treated. And, the instructions refer not only to actions but to thoughts. These are all for our benefit, our good, yet we have a habit of doing what we want to do, not what God says is best for us. This tendency is called sin. It removes us from God's grace for us. We are imperfect in His sight.

This is bad news

Bad News

Here is what God says about the bad news:

Romans 3:23
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

He says all of us sin and fall short the glory of God, of being who God wants us to be. We have no relationship with Him

And, God says also

Romans 6:23
the wages of sin is death,

He says the wages of sin (the consequence of sin) is death, or eternal separation from God, again, no relationship with the One who loves us.

Imperfection, sin, is a real problem. It separates us from God. He is holy and perfect, and will not allow less than holiness and perfection to exist with Him in eternity. As serious as this, and as much as it applies to us is we resist the label of sinner.

Resistance to label of sinner

When my bride of 48 years and I were dating I visited her and her parents and went to church with them in Kansas City. During a time of prayer, we were asked to kneel and repeat a prayer that began with the words:

"I acknowledge and bewail my manifold sins and wickedness, Which I, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against me."

I refused to complete that prayer and "took back" the idea that I was sinful and wicked in God's sight, deserving of His wrath and indignation. You see, I thought I was good enough, not as good as some, but better than most. I was taking refuge in myself, in my own personal goodness.

The problem is that good enough is a human standard, grading on the curve, but not God's standard. His is holiness, perfect righteousness, for all of life—past present and future. Bad news for those who are not perfect—that is all of us.

SALVATION FROM SIN

So, what are we to do. The good news is we don't have to do anything. There is nothing we can do. It's all about what God who loves us did for us.

And, here is what God did. He provided a point of refuge that cost us nothing but cost him everything, even a painful death. God put on an "earth suit" and became a man, Jesus, died with our sins on him, a substitute, and rose from the dead assuring us of new life. This is good news!

Substitute

To make clear the idea of a substitute, consider this story of the love of a mother for her child. From an article in *Outdoors Magazine* September 18, 2007

On August 19, 1996, 36-year-old Cindy Parolin and three of her children were riding horses in the backcountry of British Columbia. Like their mother, 6-year-old Steven, 11-year-old Melissa and 13-year-old David felt a mixture of wonder and excitement as they traveled through the vast wilderness. The four were headed to a cabin to join Parolin's husband and other son for a camping vacation.

As the family rode along, the horses grew increasingly nervous. The cause became starkly clear when a cougar attacked, suddenly launching itself from the undergrowth at Steven. The cat was on the youngster in an instant.

Parolin watched the unfolding scene in horror as the cat bared its fangs and then bit into the boy's skull. A knowledgeable outdoorswoman she knew that her son would be dead in a matter of seconds -- his neck broken, skull crushed or artery lacerated in the lion's terrible jaws. She had to act quickly. The desperate mother leapt from her horse and rushed to Steven's aid.

With adrenaline-fueled strength, Parolin broke a stout limb from a fallen tree and clubbed the cat away from the child. The lion turned its full attention to her, opening a terrible gash on her arm with a swipe of its paw, the first of many wounds Spurred by maternal instincts, Parolin fought back.

Still thinking of her children, the embattled mother screamed for David and Melissa to grab Steven and run for help. The horses had scattered in the melee, so the older siblings carried their bleeding brother more than a mile back down the trail to the family car.

Melissa stayed with Steven in the vehicle while David ran to a nearby campsite for help. He enlisted the aid of Jim Manion, who, directed by David, drove to the scene. It had been more than an hour since his mother had clubbed the cat off his younger brother. On arriving, Manion heard the mother's screams. Moving toward the agonized sounds, he came upon Cindy Parolin, fatally wounded, still battling the cougar. She turned to Manion, a look of raging defiance in her eyes.

"Are my children all right?"

"Yes," Manion answered.

On hearing they were okay, she said in a half-whisper, "I am dying now."

Although Manion had armed himself with a 12-gauge pump shotgun, he had been afraid to shoot at the cougar for fear of hitting the woman. The cougar left the unconscious woman and advanced on Manion.

With no time to aim, he leveled the gun at the cat and fired from the hip. The charge caught the cougar a bit far back, but it was enough. Manion rushed to Parolin's aid, but she was beyond help, having traded her life for that of her son. Steven survived the near scalping inflicted by the cougar and made a full recovery after receiving 70 stitches in his head

This mother sacrificed herself, becoming a substitute for those she loved. She died so they could escape the certain death of the mountain lion attack.

So that we could escape the certain death of sin that separates us from God, He provided a substitute, Jesus. It had to be Jesus, a perfect man, to satisfy the demands of a perfect God who loves us.

Good news

God's love for us and His provision of a substitute is truly good news, and here is how He describes it:

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Even as sinners, no matter how bad the sin, God provides a solution for us. We don't have to change our behavior and be good, but we must change our minds and believe in Jesus. Our behavior will change later as we follow the One Who took our sins away.

Ephesians 2

As for you, (speaking to those who formerly were not followers of Jesus) you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² ... by nature deserving of wrath....⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Look at our natural state, our default mode—dead in our transgressions. Our default mode is condemnation. God provides the gift of salvation, by His own grace; faith is the natural response. And faith provides the right relationship with the right person for the right destiny with God

Brian Summerall—I'm with Him

When Don Henley goes to an Eagles concert, he can go anywhere. Remember, he started the band, the Eagles, he co-founded it. When he walks in the gate, they say come in Mr. Henley. When he approaches the stage, a way is cleared for him. When he goes backstage, the room is prepared for him. He is Don Henley.

My friend, Brian Summerall, is a fan of the Eagles. In his world Brian is very successful with family and work, and is welcomed with open arms by those who know him. All agree he is a good man. If he were to go to an Eagles concert thinking his good life and accomplishments matter at the gate, the stage or the room backstage, he would be turned away. None of his successful life matters to those in charge of admission.

Unless he goes with Don Henley. You see, Don is Brian's brother-in-law. So, when they ask Brian at the gate why they should let him in, he points to Don Henley and says "I'm with him; when he goes to the stage and they say why should we let you on

stage, he says I'm with him; when they go backstage together, to a room prepared for Don and his friends, and they ask Brian why he should get in, Brian says "I'm with him". You see, Brian takes refuge in his relationship with Don. The right relationship with the right person is all he needs for the destination he desires.

God has provided a way for us to be in right relationship with Jesus. We must believe in Him and his substitution for our sins. Here is how God says it.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This gift comes through God himself, Jesus, who took our sins to the grave with him. He provided an eternal solution to the problem of sin for those who believe in him

John 3:18

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

This is a good summary of the bad news and the good news. It's bad because if we don't believe, then we will die in our natural state of condemnation, and be eternally separated from God. We must only believe in Jesus to be saved into eternity with God.

But, what does the word, believe, mean? You can see how important it is.

It is our part in salvation (refer to verses on screen).

We must believe to be saved from our sins...unbelief means we remain condemned.

Believe

Regarding salvation, believe has three components:

It is acknowledgment of a fact statement about something

It is agreeing the facts in the statement are true, it is intellectual assent

It is appropriating the facts and applying them to me, trusting in the object of those facts.

So, what then is this kind of belief?

Blondin

Charles Blondin, who was born named Jean Francois Gravelet was a tightrope walker in the mid-19th century. As a 4 year old child he walked on a rope between two chairs and 5 went to a gymnastics academy, and his future was set. Ultimately growing to an adult of 5' 5" and 140 pounds he possessed remarkable strength and balance.

During his life he crossed Niagra Falls on a tightrope more than 300 times, and at various times cooked an omelet along the way, having carried the stove and utensils on his back, and lowered it on a rope to those below in a tourist boat; and on another sat in a chair, ate a piece of cake and washed it down with champagne. On another occasion he carried his manager, Harry Colcord across on his back, saying to him "Look up Harry... you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin...If I sway, sway with me; don't attempt to balance yourself. If you do, we will both go to our death.

The story is told that on one such occasion he arrived and immediately attracted a crowd.

The manager asked "Have you heard of the Great Blondin?"

The crowd responded in a roar that they had.

The manager asked the crowd if they believed Blondin could push a wheelbarrow across the span and back,

They shouted loudly, Yes! They believed Blondin could do that. Their intellectual assent was solid.

Then the manager asked who would be willing to get in the wheelbarrow for Blondin to push him. Who would trust Blondin to cross safely, while riding in the wheelbarrow?

Crickets!! No one said anything, except his mother, who got in.

You see, the crowd of people did not trust in Blondin with their lives. Their belief was not real. It fell short of the standard of trust.

God's standard for belief is trust. He tells us to believe, to trust in Jesus, the object of our trust. That is faith that saves us from sin and condemnation, placing our trust in Christ and Christ alone for our sin problem. It is a transfer of trust from myself, believing I am good enough to trusting in Jesus, his perfection substituted for my imperfection. It is our only hope and it is a certain hope.

Cancer of Sin

Last year after experiencing increasing pain in my mouth, I was diagnosed with tongue cancer. Having been diagnosed, I was provided a treatment program, a way to cure the cancer before it led to death. The treatment itself was not pleasant, even painful, but my doctors offered relief from the pain in the form of opioid pain killers. They worked great. In fact, after continuing the treatment program, but well before the end of it, I felt so good I suggested to one of the doctors that I might be cured—the pain had gone away. He paused for a moment, then looked me in the eyes to hold

my attention, and said, "Bob, some cancer patients go to the grave taking pain medication without the right treatment".

We, you and I, have a cancer problem, called sin, and there is nothing we can do about it unless we have taken our refuge in Jesus, the right relationship with the person for the right destiny.

RESPONSE

Is Jesus your point of refuge? What will you say, what will I say, when after we die God asks us why He should let us into His heaven, to a room prepared for us? If we say I led a good life, **that's** not good enough. If we say I went to church all my life, **that** is not good enough. If we say I knew **about** you, God, He could say, "I never **knew** you". If we have trusted in Jesus for our salvation, transferred our trust from ourselves to Him, then we can enter our desired destination with God. Then we get to go the room prepared for us, the point of refuge forever.

That day is coming for all of us. If you are one who, like me in my story years ago, has been in church all your life; or if you are hearing this for the first time; or something in between, the question today is this—what, who, is your point of refuge? Have you trusted Jesus for your salvation, your refuge from your sins? Is there any reason you would not want to place your trust in Jesus today??

There....is....no....other....way. Remember, trust goes beyond intellectual assent. It is getting into the wheelbarrow.

As we bow our heads I will lead us and you can follow along silently just where you are and, as you are—an imperfect person, in need of the perfect person for refuge.

PRAYER OF SALVATION.

Lord, God, I know I am a sinner and that sin separates me from you. I know Jesus died for my sins and I am now placing my trust in him for removal of my sins so that I might live eternally with you in Heaven. Amen