



Palm Sunday 2024
Isaiah 53
The Comprehensive Cross

Summary: We are saved by a Messiah, not a message, a method, or a man; so, what does that mean?

Today we celebrate what is known on the Church calendar as Palm Sunday. It marks the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and presented Himself to the Jewish nation as the Savior long promised by the prophets. And, the people knew what He was doing. They put palm fronds down in front of Him and cried out “Hosanna” meaning “Save us now!” The Jewish leaders told Him to make the people to stop; they didn’t want the Romans to think they were announcing a new king. But Jesus said if these people stop, the very rocks will cry out, for this day HAS to happen. God said it would.

The question is, what exactly, did Jesus come to save people from? What did He come to fix? Well, people who lived long ago were not that different from us – they wanted to see political change, they wanted a better economy, they wanted better relationships. And if anyone was disappointed with Jesus, then or now, it’s usually tied to the fact that He didn’t come to save us from any of those things directly, He came to save us from the thing underneath all of those things – the thing that causes all our political, economic, relational, and even mental and physical problems - Jesus came to save us from sin.

And that is what I want to talk about this morning. I want to focus on what sin is and what Jesus did about it so that our hearts and minds are in the right place for celebrating both Good Friday and Easter.

So, what is sin?

I like to put it this way – *sin is doing what you want to do instead of what God says to do.* That means sin usually feels pretty good for a minute – it’s *what you wanted to do.*



Many of you have seen the movie Frozen right? Or, you’ve heard the famous song, “Let It Go.” Elsa, the queen of Arendelle has this magical ability to freeze things that she’s always kept hidden.

Well, what happens when Elsa ‘lets it go?’ It feels good. She swirls and twirls - her *power flurries through the air into the ground her soul is spiraling in frozen fractals all around.* She lets her hair down, literally, and it all seems so liberating. Afterall, *the cold never bothered her anyway!*



But what else happens? What were the consequences of Elsa letting go?

Well, there are personal consequences for her actions – she becomes isolated. She’s living alone in a big ice castle on a hill – it’s just her and her powers, and a snow monster. It’s lonely.



And not just for Elsa. Anna, her sister is distraught and misses the sister who was also her best friend and whom she always loved.

On top of that, everyone in the kingdom of Arendelle is now suffering because when Elsa ‘let it go’ she turned the whole town into an icy wasteland.



Here's the point: sin can feel good for a minute, when you “let it go” when you do what you feel like doing – but it always has consequences – for the sinner, and for those affected by the sinner’s sin.

So, sin includes the category of **commission**, letting it go with the things we *do*, the things we *say*, even the things we *think* that are contrary to God.

But there are also sins of **omission** – when we don’t do things that we’re supposed to.

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

And there’s plenty of that in our lives – we feel this nudge to do something or say something and we resist. We brush it aside or talk ourselves out of it. We leave undone something that should have happened.

Regardless of whether it’s doing what we shouldn’t or avoiding what we should, the one thing all sin has in common is choosing me over God – I have these desires in me and they go against what God has said. If I choose them, I choose against God.

Well, there is a penalty for that, just as there is a penalty for the child who chooses his own desire over the instruction of his parents, or a penalty for the soldier who chooses his own desire over the command of his captain, or the citizen who chooses his own desire over the laws of the land.

The punishment God has established for sin is death.

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death...

And after death, eternal judgment. There’s a lot we could say about that – Jesus spoke much and often about hell – heaven is not an automatic reality for everyone. But, this morning in light of Palm Sunday, we want to focus more on the fact that God made it possible for us to escape that judgment – notice,

...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Long, long, ago, in a galaxy right, right here, God sent the prophet Isaiah with a message about how this would happen. It's recorded in Isaiah 53, an incredibly beautiful passage, where the prophet testifies of a Suffering Servant sent by God to be our salvation. Read with me:

Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.
3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,
And who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.
9 And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.
11 He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.

This passage was recorded hundreds of years before Jesus was born and yet He obviously fulfills it in countless ways. The one I really want to draw our attention to is in verse

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity [wrongdoing, sin] of us all.

We see two important things here: First, God says we have all sinned, every single one of us, and yet, second, God has laid all of our sin, or iniquities, on Jesus.

As you prepare your hearts and minds this week for Good Friday and Easter, I want you to think about three things.

1. We are not saved by a message we hear.

Christians often speak of the gospel, “the good news,” but we are not saved by hearing a message. We’re not like a ship going off course that just needs to be told, “Steer three degrees right!”

If we only needed to hear something, if it was just a few points of data that we needed to have in our mental storage bank – God could have spoken from Heaven – like He did at Mt Sinai when He gave the Ten Commandments. The Bible says the people heard the voice of God speak. So, if we just needed to know something, God could have spoken to everyone all once directly.

Or, He could have used the angels. Throughout Scripture we see God send angels to specific people to give them a message, think of the prophet Daniel, or Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, or Mary the mother of Jesus. Scripture even says that sometimes we interact with angels and we’re simply not aware that’s what, or who, they are.

Angels have also been used to broadcast announcements to groups. Think of the angels that appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus. They brought a message to people from God. And in the book of Revelation we see they'll do the same thing at the end of time – flying across the sky in Chapter 14 - declaring the gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue and people. The point is: God can, has, and will, use angels to convey a message.

He also communications information through people, we call them prophets. If there was a message we needed to receive, God could have sent a prophet with either spoken or written words – He's done it many times before, including through men like Isaiah.

But, again, the answer to the problem of sin wasn't a set of words or a concept, it wasn't a code we needed to know to open the door – press 1, 2, 5 and then press 3 and 4 at the same time and it will open. No. That wasn't the nature of our problem with sin, so a message or information was not the solution.



Messages were involved, God announced that the Answer was going to come, or today, that He already has come – the “gospel” is the good news, or the good “message” of what the Messiah has done for us; but we're not saved by a message, we're not saved by information, we're saved by what the Messiah has done.

2. We are not saved by a Method.

The answer to the problem of sin, was not a formula to follow, a program, or a pattern – Christianity is not a method of salvation. Today you can find all kinds of diet and exercise programs that promise ‘do this and you'll lose the weight – just stick to the programming.’ Avoid all the carbs. Avoid all the fat. Eat nothing but meat. Eat everything but meat. There are all kinds of methods of dieting and many of them will help you lose weight, at least initially. But there is *no equivalent method* for working off the weight of your sin. Not even the Law of the Old Testament with all it's procedures and sacrifices.

Those of you who did the Turn Aside study in Exodus, or who are doing the one on Deuteronomy right now know - the Law was designed to keep Israel culturally distinct and focused on their special relationship with God, and it was full of symbols that prepared people for what God was going to do, but it was not intended to wash away sin.

Heb 10:4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

No one ever completely dealt with the problem of sinning against a holy God by simply killing a lamb or a goat. It was all just to remind them of the severity of their sin and how much they needed a true Savior. The method of living by the Law and it's sacrifices all pointed to the need for the Messiah.

In fact, even the crucifixion itself, as a *method* of death, was not the answer to our sin. It was necessary in that it was foretold, but God could, if He desired, have chosen another way for

Jesus to die. So why did God choose the cross? Probably because crucifixion is one of the most horrific and painful ways to die.



It was typically preceded by beatings, the victim was marched to the site of the execution, then nailed to the timbers and left exposed to the elements struggling to breathe. Death often took days. Most victims ultimately died from asphyxiation – being unable to inhale any longer - and exposure, being exposed to the elements night and day as infection set into their wounds.

The ancient Roman philosopher Cicero said sophisticated people should not even speak of crucifixion because it was a disgraceful subject not suited to the ears of decent Roman Citizens. It was also thought of as weak and foolish – you were there on display for all to see, a trophy to the might of your executioners who could boast - we did this to you, we're strong, you're weak.

Thanks be to God we don't see or hear of it much in our day and age, but it certainly wasn't a unique form of execution for Jesus – if you remember there were even two other men being crucified with him on that day. You might be surprised to learn this – but actually tens of thousands, probably into the hundreds of thousands, of people have been crucified through history.

Spartacus – led an army of former slaves in a revolt against the Roman aristocracy until they were eventually crushed by the Roman Army. Sixty six hundred of his followers were crucified and left to hang along the Appian Way – the main highway leading into Rome (it would be like hanging them along Route 66) – their bodies were ordered to never be taken down and hung there for years.



Peter was crucified **upside-down** – that's even more extreme

So again, the point is: the solution for our sin was **not a method, either to live by or to die by**. Our salvation was purchased in a way that none of us could repeat – not even by giving up our own lives on the cross, because Jesus was not like a martyr dying for a cause. He was the Messiah, bearing the weight, guilt, and burden of our sins. **The LORD had laid upon Him the iniquity of us all**. His method of death on the Cross accomplished something invisible to the human eye – He was paying the penalty for our sins. For that reason, **no other man could take His place** on the cross or in any other way. Which brings us to our next point:

3. We are not saved by a man.

Our salvation was not brought about by a Man – though God has used ordinary men in extraordinary ways. Moses parted the Red Sea. Jonah survived being swallowed by a great fish. Philip was miraculously transported from one place to another after baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.

God has also used people in groups to do incredible things for His glory. The Israelites drove out the Canaanites and inherited the Promised Land. The early disciples spread the gospel across the Mediterranean.

Today we see men do great, selfless and heroic acts for the benefit of others – they give a kidney to a donor match in need of a transplant. Such deeds are awe inspiring and we hold them up as virtuous examples – but even this kind of selflessness for the sake of another man doesn't deal with the offense our sin creates *against God*. Heroes are inspiring, but we need a savior.

And so

John 3:16 God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

God sent us His Son as our Messiah, our Savior.

Now, some may ask: Is that true? Is it fair? Is it the **only** way things could have been worked out? Did Jesus have to have my sins laid on Him? Well, Jesus asked the same question.

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus gathered His disciples together for the famous Last Supper. And then He went to the Garden of Gethsemane where He famously prayed:

Luke 22:42 "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

Jesus asked the Father – take this away from me – I don't want to go to the cross unless it's absolutely necessary. Are there any other options? And the answer was, no. There was no other way for our sin to be dealt with. This was the way it had to be done. Only He could become a sufficient sacrifice for us. Only He could fully fix what we had broken. We didn't need a message of information or a method for what to do, or even a man who could lead us or serve us or take care of our problems for us.

That's an important message for us to hear – it doesn't matter how much you have accomplished, and some of you have accomplished a lot - even if you have succeeded at everything else you've ever tried, you still couldn't manage your own sin, much less take care of anyone else. On the other hand, if you feel like you're a failure, that you've messed up everything up to this point, then you'd have to add this to your list of failures too.

You see, there are some problems that man just can't solve by himself – and this is the greatest of them all. So, Jesus, the Messiah, stepped down from Heaven to do the work for us.

Jesus came to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to die for our sins. **Everything else He could have done from Heaven or through men.** Only God could deliver us from the problem of sin, and He did.

Sin is a big deal.

So how do we respond to all of this? Well, first and foremost – we need to develop a healthier respect for how big of a deal sin is – all sin – great or small – *it's really this big of a deal to God.* It's such a big deal that it couldn't be fixed by a message, a method, or a man. There's nothing you can do to save yourself from it, nothing you can do to excuse yourself for it, nothing you can do to make up for it, nothing you can do to conquer it on your own. We really do need God to help us.

What sin has He been convicting you of lately? What actions or attitudes have you been noticing – and maybe you're having that inner debate over why it's really OK for you to be that way, or say those things or look at that stuff, why, in light of all the circumstances, this is really no big deal.

Think about what we've just looked at – it is that big of a deal. And the only way for you to be forgiven of it is to bring it under the shed blood of Christ.

Because, Sin is a big deal. But Salvation is even bigger.

Think about this – Jesus died to cover **all** your sins – big and little. There's no threshold – He didn't say, I'll take everything above murder, grand theft, and adultery and you can sweep up everything underneath – no! – He came to take care of it all.

So, confess your sins to Jesus to this morning – if there is anything you need to get off your chest – lay it at His feet and know that you can find forgiveness.

*6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

Jesus Christ came to save you. To redeem you. To enable you to begin to experience and express heaven here and now on earth. Next week on Resurrection Sunday we're going to talk about what His resurrection means for us, how it gives us new life in every area of life. But today we need to remember that before we can have new life – there must be death and that is why He went to the cross. If Jesus has taken your place – if He really is bearing the weight and guilt of your sin – praise Him for it. And ask Him what else in you needs to change.

If He is not – then I have good news for you – He is ready, willing and able to wash you clean right now. There is NOTHING you could have done, there is nothing that has been done to you that God cannot or will not wash away.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You're not a special case for God – He's seen worse. So come to Him, confess to Him, and be cleansed by Him this morning and then come back next week and really celebrate Easter for the first time in your life.

Let's Pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Palm Sunday 2024 The Comprehensive Cross

Summary: We are saved by a Messiah, not a message, a method, or a man; so, what does that mean?

- Have you ever celebrated or recognized Palm Sunday in church? What was it like?
- Where do you see the differences in the way Christmas is celebrated in your own life, home, and in the community? Why do you think there is such a difference?
- Pastor Jeff said, “Sin is doing what you want to do instead of what God says to do. That means sin usually feels pretty good for a moment – it’s what you wanted to do.” How do you react to this?
- Think of a time when you “Let it go.” Did that help? Or, did it hurt? What effect did you letting it go have on others?
- What are you more likely to struggle with – sins of omission (things you should do, but don’t) or sins of commission (things you shouldn’t do, but do)?
- What are some ways that people try to deal with their guilt or shame on their own?
 - o Give an example of a message people think will save them or change everything. Give an example of a method people think will fix or solve everything. Give an example of people putting their hope and trust in a man who will turn everything around or be the answer we need.
 - o What is the outcome of each? Do they work a little bit? Why do they ultimately fall short?
 - o Are you more likely to try to make up for your sins and shortcomings by trying harder or suffering more? Why is that your default response?

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

- What do you notice about the inclusivity of this verse?