

Welcome to the final week of Shalom.

I hope these teachings over the past weeks have reminded you that death and disease do **not** win in the end. God is the God who brings Shalom *peace* into the midst of our storms. He is also the one who grieves with us as we feel the pain and loss swirling around us.

Ultimately He is the one who shows us the way to Shalom by taking the way of Sacrifice. He then calls each of us down that path with him. I would imagine that if there were blow ups in your home this week as we all live in tight quarters it was because someone or both ones chose to take the way of self rather than sacrifice.

Today, as we conclude these teachings on Shalom and begin preparing for Easter; I want to talk about **how** true peace, true Shalom comes. How all the pieces are picked up and put back together again...

How does Shalom *wholeness* come to a world so broken and so fractured?

From the start this whole thing has felt bigger to me than just a virus spreading its tentacles across the globe. It has held this spiritual quality to it that feels and seems like something much darker and much more sinister. It's as though it is an attack emanating from the very forces of darkness that Paul says we wrestle against in Ephesians 6. It feels like the "upside down" is spreading.

Now...

Maybe this had something to do with the fact that as this virus broke I was in the middle of reading this **epic novel** about a virus that transforms people into these **vampire-like creatures who reaped war, death, and destruction across the earth**. I mean, seriously, you should have seen my dreams as this novel and new reality met in my dream world.

Each.

And.

Every.

Night.

I would descend into this cocktail of Covid and vampires.

Brutal.

But there is a reality here isn't there?

The words being used now in the news speak of as though we ARE in a time of war.

- *"We are at war with an invisible enemy"*
- **PBS News Headline** : *U.S. facing 2-front war amid medical crisis and economic collapse*
- Even New York was described as a *war zone* with its hospitals looking more like military field hospitals.

But this is not like any war or crisis we have faced before.

Has there ever been a world-wide disaster that pushed everyone of us apart like this?

I mean, most disasters create almost a reactionary embrace. Think 9/11 or WWII... these tragedies were full of pain and heartache but as the days grew darker we held each other tighter.

But this... This is different.

The more this virus spreads the further we are pushed apart. We are separated from friends, families, co-workers, and each other. And while the introverts amongst us may have initially even celebrated inside (as we extroverts die a little inside each day), even you are feeling the effects of the separation at this point right?

Here's the incredible reality about this time though...

This virus serves as a vivid picture of sin as it spreads across our world separating each other from the things we know and love and hold dear. It's like this microcosm where the entire world can literally see what sin is like in all of it's vicious and viral wickedness.

We even have those *heathen* spring breakers enthralling themselves in the midst of it all, living it up, with no cares or concerns about what their actions are doing to themselves or to those around them. Taking in the virus and spreading it amongst themselves as they become unwitting hosts of the virus, carrying it back to their cities and into their homes.

It's not really all that different from the dad who has an affair and thinks... "*What's really the big deal? It's not like I'm hurting anyone.*" When in reality you are becoming a carrier for something much worse than Covid - a disease that will wreck your wife, your children, and your home.

It's as though Covid has painted this visible picture of the invisible sin that is all around us all the time.

I mean what a vivid, living illustration!

And here's the kicker... It's not just the spring breakers who are getting it is it?

It's those who just dabble in social interactions believing there's no way we would actually be affected by it. Or.. it's those who did everything right only to find out they too have been infected.

It really is this clear visible picture of the invisible sin that is all around us.

Just as Covid spreads into our world separating us from each other, so too did sin spread - *beginning in the first humans* - moving from one person to the next, one generation to another, infecting all of us and separating all of us from each other and from our Creator.

Maybe this explains how we live in a world where more and more believe there is no God.

Or believe, if there is a God, He took off a long time ago like a dead-beat dad.

But the Bible tells us a different story. It tells us that God did not run from us but to us. Jesus was God made flesh - God descending into this death and sadness and tears to rescue us from the separation we feel in our bones. .

If you want to end the separation you need to end the disease.

We all know this right now don't we? To come together now - in this moment - would only make things worse. It would only cause the virus to spread further faster. But the solution is not to remain separated from each other. That is clearly no way to live!

The only solution is to cure the disease.

Then, and only then, can we come together again.

That is why Scripture says.. Jesus said he did not come for the healthy but for the sick.

Jesus came to heal the sick and set the captives free!

He did that literally. As he went healing the diseased and sick all around him. The blind would see, the deaf would hear, the sick were made well. Each miracle, an undoing of the effects of sin in our world.

But how do you cure this disease of sin?

This thing that separates all of us...

This is the question we find answered in John 20... *(Grab your Bibles and go there.)*

Jesus' disciples - those are the 12 guys that followed Jesus - have become lost in the darkness of sin that had descended on them that weekend 2000 years ago. Only one week earlier they had rode into Jerusalem as victors with Jesus being hailed as the True King and Messiah.

Now, **Jesus is dead**. Killed on a cross and buried for three days. **Judas is dead too**. A victim of his own hands after betraying Jesus to death. **Peter is shaken to his core** after turning his back on Jesus and denying him, not once, but three times.

The 11 of them that remain are hiding, wondering why he would give up so easily and not even put up a fight. It is into this place of fear, doubt, chaos, darkness, and death that Jesus steps in amongst them...

Read with me in **John 20...**

19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,

Locked doors and fear. Sounds familiar right?

Why are they afraid?

Why are they afraid of the Jews?

These were the people who had arrested Jesus, held a mockery of a court session in the middle of the night, accused him of leading an insurrection and handed him over to Pilate to be crucified.

If they did Jesus that way... well... they knew who the Jews were coming for next.

But it wasn't the Jews or the Romans who showed up...

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

I imagine glad was an understatement! Here he was flesh and blood before them. Death did not hold. Nothing would ever be the same again! And just like he did with them in those early

days in the boat out on the Sea of Galilee he calmed the storms raging around them with just one word - **Shalom**.

21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

We cannot miss this. The announcement of Shalom comes 2 times with 2 actions.

1. **Shalom - And he shows them his hands and his side**
2. **Shalom - And he breathes on them**

These statements of peace framing a visual picture of his death and resurrection.

The pierced Hands and Side - a sign of crucifixion

See! All of this was bringing Jesus - and now us - to the cross and resurrection. It was the place all of his healings were leading to - where he would go to the very heart of the virus that had infected all of us. He would descend into death itself to deal once and for all with sin and all its effects.

Here is the cure.

The cross is the cure.

Because the cross was the weapon.

It was what God used to weaponize sin against itself. Jesus went to the cross on behalf of all humanity. He willingly took on the infection that had spread into the heart of every human and brought it all into himself. **It was as though all the sin and darkness of the world descended on him in this one critical moment. Jesus, like a magnet, drawing all the disease of the world into himself.** It's why we see in the Gospel stories **demons come shrieking out of tombs** towards him as he draws the darkness of the world onto himself.

And in that moment on the cross as he drew in the sin of all humanity he breathed out the forgiveness of God saying...

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

He went to death, paying the ultimate price, to bring us forgiveness and rescue us from death.

Harrowing of Hell

- Iconic painting of the Early church
- Jesus going down into death
- Taking the hand of Adam and Eve

Some may ask... Why can't God just forgive?

Why the cross?

Why death?

Is all that stuff even necessary?

It seems archaic and primitive to say we need blood and sacrifice for forgiveness?

If God is God... why can't He just forgive?.

But... That's exactly what He did. He just forgave.

But... Forgiveness always comes at a cost.

When I was a kid I had a 1989 Honda Civic Si - a thing of beauty. When Tiff first met me she called it my go-cart! It was my first car and an incredible gift from my parents. I still remember the sense of freedom I had when I got behind the wheel of that thing. A full tank of gas, windows down, sunroof up, and Regulators blasting from the small factory speakers that may as well have been a state of the art system as far as i was concerned. But... I was

never really keen on changing the oil of that thing. And wouldn't you know it... I blew the engine.

My dad forgave me. But those words didn't fix the car. Someone still had to pay to fix the damage that was done. There was no way I could afford it. I'm not even sure how he did to be honest. But he did.

My dad paid.

That is what happens with forgiveness at the cross. Our Father pays. Forgiveness, true forgiveness, always costs.

Jesus, taking the Way of Sacrifice, took up his cross to pay for sin - **to put an end to the disease** - and offer the breath of forgiveness for all who would receive it.

And that was the Second sign...

The breath of life he breathed on them - just like God did with Adam in the garden - a sign of the resurrection

N.T. Wright // *In other words, with the resurrection of Jesus a new world has dawned in which forgiveness of sins is not simply a private experience; it is a fact about the cosmos. Sin is the root cause of death; if death has been defeated, it must mean that sin has been dealt with.*

This is how Shalom comes.

This is how all the broken pieces are brought back to wholeness. Through forgiveness flowing down from the cross into the life of every person and every generation. This end of separation started with Jesus and moved to his disciples and now flows through us into our world.

So Jesus says to them, „***As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.***”

He is using this moment of Shalom to send them out.

Where?

Back to the very people who they had just been hiding in fear from!

And here is the message Jesus gives them...

23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

He is sending them, and us, into a world separated by sin and fear. He is sending us with the announcement of forgiveness. We become the announcers of a new reality. The disease has been cured! The root cause has been dealt with. Separation is now over!

This commissioning to the forgiveness of sins is the privilege of every follower of Jesus. It is not reserved for a select few. We are called to be agents of God's new world sharing the Good News of forgiveness. The danger, and I think Jesus warns his disciples of this, is that we would withhold this forgiveness.

Forgiveness is there for all who would believe!

See that is the thing about forgiveness... it must be believed... trusted.

Because forgiveness is relational.

If you don't trust me when I forgive you then the separation between us still exists. I may have offered forgiveness but because you do not believe me the separation still exists between us - we do not have the relationship we should have.

But...

If you believe... then the separation is over! Shalom is restored!

This is how Shalom comes. Through **Forgiveness and Trust**.

Application

You and I have been sent as messengers of Forgiveness. This is how the world comes back together again.

1. Know that you have been forgiven.

When we know that we have been forgiven, we know that there is nothing that separates us from the love of God. We will say with Paul - *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* As you trust that, you will know you are forgiven. You will personally experience this Shalom of oneness with your creator as your little piece of this broken puzzle is brought back into wholeness again.

When we know that we have been forgiven we stop hiding. We come out of the shadows. And in that exposed place, the light of Christ begins to heal all the wounds we have been trying to hide in the darkness. Are you tired of dealing with wounds in the dark? The darkness may be able to hide the scars but it cannot heal them. Bring them into the light and let the light of Christ heal your brokenness.

When we know that we have been forgiven we can then move to...

2. Live in forgiveness with those around you.

N.T. Wright // *Forgiveness is a way of life, God's way of life, God's way to life; and if you close*

your heart to forgiveness, why, then you close your heart to forgiveness. That is the point of the terrifying parable in Matthew 18, about the slave who had been forgiven millions but then dragged a colleague into court to settle a debt of a few pence. If you lock up the piano because you don't want to play to somebody else, how can God play to you? That is why we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." That isn't a bargain we make with God. It's a fact of human life. Not to forgive is to shut down a faculty in the innermost person, which happens to be the same faculty that can receive God's forgiveness.

3. Share this message with all who will hear - GOD HAS FORGIVEN!

Just like he sent his first disciples, he now sends you. You are a declarer that the world is operating in a new way. Forgiveness is a statement of a new reality. They are not forgiven if they do something. They are forgiven and they need to receive something.

Blessing

Colossians 1 MSG

18-20 He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.

21-23 You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually dying for you, Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence. You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Message, careful not to be distracted or diverted. There is no other Message—just this one. Every creature under heaven gets this same Message.