

Are You Prepared?

A sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:21

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is the saddest event you've ever experienced in your personal life? I would venture to guess for many of you, it was likely the death of a loved one. Maybe a grandparent, a cousin, a close friend. It's hard. It's a sad and emotional situation, and yet, it's one we all have to experience because, like it or not, every day you're here is one day closer to you being gone from this life, to you experiencing death.

Now, you know, death is a topic so many people try to avoid talking about, especially their own death, and for good reasons. It's scary, I don't know what to expect, I don't want to fathom growing older and having my body grow weaker and weaker and to have my organs start shutting down...or the pain of a sudden heart-attack or a stroke or some accident that will end it all.

Or, the other big reason...it's really not on my radar screen right now. I'm young, I'm healthy, I still have a spring in my step, there's no need for me to think about it, and there's definitely not a need to be making preparations for it.

But if there's one thing that's unavoidable in this life, that is it. Every single one of us will all die. It doesn't matter what smoke screens you'll throw up to try to avoid the inevitable, but we will all die.

So are you prepared for it? I'm not talking about being prepared to die, but for what comes after death. Or, maybe a different way to ask it is this: if you were to die tonight, are you sure you would be in heaven? Think about that for a moment. If your answer is yes, then, if you were to die tonight, and God was to ask you, "Why should I let you into heaven?", what would you answer be?"

You see, that's what it comes down to. God wants us to be in heaven; he wants everyone to be in heaven. I don't think any of us here wouldn't want to be in heaven. So then, why? Why should God let you in?

Well, what does God demand for entrance into his heavenly kingdom? It's his house, he makes the rules, and just like I'm sure your parents told you, "As long as you're under my roof, you'll obey my rules," God says the same. He says, "If you want to get into my house, you must obey my rules."

Do you know what his rules are? He tells us in the Bible. He says, "Be holy, because I, the LORD your God, am holy." He says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Do you know what it means to be holy or perfect? It means to be completely set apart from sinners, to be without sin, without any flaw of any kind, to be absolutely perfect.

A man once asked Jesus what it would take for him to get to heaven and to have eternal life. When Jesus asked him what God's Word says, the man summarized God's law with two basic statements, "Love the Lord your God..." and "Love your neighbor as yourself." Basically, be perfect, all the time, that's what God demands. And Jesus agreed, "Do this, and you will live."

You know, show nothing less than a perfect love toward God and your neighbor, anyone you come into contact with, perfect in your actions, in your speech, even in your thoughts, and you will live. Always put God first in your life. Never use his name in a wrong way. Don't ever have so much as a single greedy or covetous or lustful or vengeful or jealous or selfish thought. "Be such a perfect, holy, sinless person at every moment of your life, and you will live," Jesus says.

Perfection. That's what God demands for entrance into heaven. But you know what he sees when he looks at each of us? I think you know. He doesn't see perfection. He doesn't see flawless living. He sees the opposite. He sees sin. In fact, the Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

That makes the situation oh so clear. All have sinned. Everyone has sinned. You and I have sinned. You sinning if you rob a bank. You're sinning if you commit adultery. But you're also sinning if you have greed or lust in your heart. Anything that goes against God's demands of perfection is sin.

But that's impossible. Shouldn't close be good enough? Well, imagine there's a deep canyon, 100 feet wide, separating you from God. Being absolutely perfect as God demands would be like being able to jump all the way across. Anything less is falling short. You could train for the jump all you want, you could be the world's best jumper, and it wouldn't matter whether you jumped a new world record, like 35 feet, or your shoe laces were untied and you tripped and fell off the edge. Even if you could go 90 feet, you wouldn't reach the end, and the result for all is the same...death at the bottom of the canyon.

You know, they say there's not more risky than trying to jump across a canyon in two leaps. You don't get a second chance. And the same is true with God. It takes just one sin, and you've missed the 100-foot clearance, you fallen short. You've fallen to death.

That's what God sees. Not perfection. But person after person lining up to jump that chasm between us and him and heaven, and failing miserably. The Bible says, "Your iniquities (another word for sins) have separated you from God. There's no possible way to be in a close relationship with God while there's sin separating us, driving you and me further and further from him, separating us from him forever. "The wages of sin is death," the Bible says. The death that results from our sins is an eternal separation from God in a place called hell. As long as sin is present, you're separated from God.

That's a problem. Sin's a problem everyone of us has in this life. There's no denying that. It's a disease we're all infected with.

"But there's got to be a remedy, right? There has to be some way to get to heaven, right?" "Can't I just try harder, you know, keep trying to be a good person and doing good things?" That would make God happy, right? So, the idea is that if I'm here and God's up there, and there's a ladder separating us, it's take it one rung at a time. Inching my way forward by being the best person I can be, and I'll get there, right?

But, "All have sinned and fall short..." No matter how hard you try, it will never be perfect, you will still fall short of God's glory, and it's won't ever be good enough.

“Ok, then if I can’t be perfect, then I can just make up for my sins, right? Like, if I got into an argument with my wife, said some really hurtful words to her last night, so this morning I’ll make her breakfast in bed, buy her some flowers, shower her with apologies and love and affection, and that’s good. That’ll balance out the mistakes, won’t it?”

But you notice what it can’t do? No matter how much good you do, it can’t take away the bad, and there we have Scripture staring at us, “The wages of sin (even sin that’s been balanced out) is death.”

And you could try to compare yourself, like, “I do wrong, but it’s not as bad as the person over there. I could be worse.” But compare yourself instead to God, the standard of holiness. How do you stack up? No contest.

You see, man has his own solutions of how to remedy the problem of sin, but they don’t work. The Bible tells us, “There is a way that seems right to a man (such as “try your hardest and God will accept you” or balance out the bad with the good or compare to others to make yourself look better), but in the end it leads to death. The Bible tells us, “Whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles at just one point, is guilty of breaking all of it.” So, if I could jump 99 feet across that canyon, with one white lie when I was, oh, 7, that’s one foot off of perfection, and it’s just as if I were the worst sinner, because the result is the same. We fall. We deserve death. We deserve hell.

Stinks, doesn’t it? There’s nothing you nor I can do to fix this problem. We can’t get right with God. All we can do is cry out, “What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

But “thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.” You see, we can’t remedy our sad situation, but God can, and he did. And God’s solution? His own Son, Jesus!

You see, God loves us. He doesn’t want us to suffer an eternity in hell. So he sent Jesus. Jesus, true God, became a man for us, a man like us. The only difference is he never sinned. But believe me, he was tempted, just like we are. But once Jesus asked his archenemies, who tried to trip him up every chance they got. He asked if they could find him guilty of any sin, and this was their response. Nothing. They couldn’t find anything because there was nothing to find. How God demands perfection of every person, he only found it in Jesus, who never sinned.

Well, Jesus loves us too, and he would not let us pay for our sins. So, our verse for our sermon explains what Jesus did, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God.”

It’s the great exchange. Jesus, who was sinless, became sin for us. He took our sins, every single one of them, for every single one of us, and he put them on himself. Jesus took those sins, went to the cross, and there, something amazing happened. He exchanged them. Do you know what he gave back to us? His righteousness.

You see the word right in there, in righteousness? It’s because Jesus’ death on the cross has made us right with God, has broken through that sin that was separating us from God, has done away with your every sin. Now, when God sees you, he sees righteousness. He sees Jesus’ holiness. He sees you

wrapped up in Jesus' perfection. He sees people who are now worthy to enter his heavenly home because that cross of Jesus bridge the gap, the canyon of sin separating us from God.

And you know how we can be sure we are forgiven and righteous and all our sins are gone? Jesus rose. He didn't stay dead, but three days later he came back to life. And now, because Jesus lives victorious over our sins, he has paved a path for us to heaven, where God will let us in, not because of what we've done, but because of what Jesus has done, because he lived, died, and rose.

Now, you know that expression, looking through rose-colored glasses? When God looks at us, he sees us through cross-colored glasses. We don't stop sinning, but every time we do, God sees our sins in light of Jesus and the cross, and he sees us sinless. What incredible love, what an awesome blessing that is.

So, now back to that question. Are you prepared? Are you prepared for your eternity? You are, not by yourself, of course. But as a forgiven child of God, you're ready. God could come back tomorrow, even right now, and you can be sure of where you'll end up...in heaven. And you know why? What will your answer be when God asks you why he should let you in? It won't be because of you or me or anything we've done. No, I'm going to heaven because Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose...and so are you. All because of Jesus. Only because of Jesus because he lived, he died, he rose. And that will be your confidence throughout the rest of this life, until you reach heaven because Jesus lived, Jesus died, Jesus rose. Amen.