

**Life in 6 Words – Week 3 – “SINS”**

*“Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.”*

Introduction:

When I was a pastor our church partnered with a local Christian owned haunted house. Believe it or not we used it as an outreach. We called it a preview to hell and shared the Gospel with everyone who went through it. Out of conviction they had no demons or witches but they had plenty of chain-saw wielding crazies and werewolves…because that’s Biblical.

The dad and his two kids…part of the fun of a haunted house is the adrenalin rush…Don’t worry kids that’s fake…don’t worry kids this is not quicksand, it’s woodchips covering a mattress…hey kids that’s a real chainsaw… he was terrified the rest of the trip.

One of the things I loved about this haunted house is that once in it, it seemed impossible to get out of. Once you got in there was no way out. You had to go through the whole thing and finally could escape. I can’t tell you the number of people who peed their pants trying to find a way out. Why? Because it felt inescapable. People would always run the wrong way, down the wrong hall and into the wrong room. There was a lot of dead ends in that haunted house and it terrified the participants.

As the guide I knew there was a way out. But to the customer it seemed like there was no way out.

Have you ever felt that way? Maybe it was in a haunted house or an escape room or a crowded subway, but you are suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of claustrophobia. It’s a terrible feeling.

That’s how we should feel about out sin. There’s no escaping it. Our sins separate us from God and our sins cannot be removed by good deeds…there’s no way out. And this is the labyrinth, the maze, the inescapable escape room, the haunted house so to speak, that God allows us to go through before we know Christ.

Today, we’re going to talk about how “Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.” In other words, there is no escape from sin in our own power. Last week we talked about how “Our sins separate us from God.” This week the news gets worse...there is no amount of deeds we can do that can help us escape from the ultimate haunted house…“sin.”

**“Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.”**

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast..”* Ephesians 2:8,9

* Because we are sinful by nature, we are naturally self-centered. It should come as no surprise then, that our natural, sinful tendency is to think that we must play a role in our own salvation. Surely there must be something we have to *do* to fix *our* sin problem, right? Wrong.
* There is nothing we can do to rid ourselves of our sins. There is nothing we can do to fix our own sin problem. We are too broken to fix ourselves, and

there is no amount of “good” that we can do to right what has been wronged. In other words, if the *bad* news is that we are sinners separated from God, then the *worst* news is that there is absolutely nothing we can do about it, and we are doomed unless we are rescued by someone who is able and willing!

* Not a single person is or will be in heaven boasting of how they got there because of their good deeds. Only those who trusted in Christ alone are there and will be there, and the boasting will be in Christ alone.

**“Sins cannot be removed by good deeds.” But WHY? Let’s find out....**

1. **Because we could never be good enough to enter God’s presence.**

*“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”* Rev 21:27

* Our attempts to get to heaven by our own merit could be compared to long jumping the Grand Canyon or pole-vaulting to the moon...we’d always come up short, no matter how hard we tried.
* Although good deeds are important for a follower of Christ to exhibit (not in our own strength, but by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives), they could never save us. Good deeds are vital to glorifying God and being a witness to those around us, but they must FLOW from an existing relationship with God, not be the force which FORMS it.

Illustration: White frosting on a burnt cake.

Sins cannot be removed by good deeds because we could never be good enough. Secondly…

1. **Because the law is a mirror, not a ladder.**

Have you ever fallen off a ladder? Roofing Story…well, we all fall of the ladder of the law.

*“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”* Romans 3:20

My old Pastor, Yankee Arnold, used to put it this way…waking up in the morning looking in the mirror and seeing the mess: unshaven, eye boogers, ear hairs, matted hair…and then taking the mirror down with it to try to clean up with the mirror, trying to shave with the mirror….No a mirror shows us the mess….but we are shaved by grace…sorry, Dad joke…actually preacher joke.

* Think about the story of the “rich young ruler” in Matthew 19:16-26 (explain.) Jesus wasn’t saying that he could obtain salvation by a good deed, he was showing him his true need –forgiveness of sin. Jesus “pulled out the mirror” to reveal the rich young ruler’s heart. In his conversation with Jesus, the rich young ruler implied that he was able to meet the perfect standard of God’s Law. None of us, including him, are able to do that. Jesus was showing him his sins, and his need for a Savior. Before we can respond appropriately to God’s call to salvation, we must realize why and how we can be saved.

Illustration: Dentist…the dye don’t lie…the law don’t lie.

Use the law with the religious or morally arrogant to show them that they are sinners down deep inside.

Jesus made it really clear in Matthew 5 the intent of the law…

* You’ve heard it said, but I say unto you.
  + Don’t commit adultery…if you’ve ever lusted
  + Don’t commit murder…if you’ve ever been angry
  + Don’t just love your friends…love your enemies
  + Matthew 5:48, “*Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*”

Like having to hit a hole in one on every hole of a 18 hole golf course, every day for a lifetime. It’s impossible. But that’s what the law is going for. It’s showing us the impossibility of heading to heaven down the path of the law. It’s showing us how truly sinful we are. The law is a mirror, not a ladder.

1. **Because even our good deeds come from selfish motives.**

*“…all our righteous acts are like filthy rags….”* Isaiah 64:6

* + God will judge us for everything!

Illustration: **We know now**… “I will never forget picking up a telephone one day, dialing home and suddenly the lines get crossed and BAM I am listening to two guys talking. I was about to hang up the phone but what they were talking about was really capturing my attention. So I decided to eavesdrop for just a few minutes…I thought to myself “What in the world did he do?” I also thought, “I will never have an opportunity like this again.” So in my scariest voice…I said, “We know now!!!” Laughed and hung up the phone!

* + - According to Matthew 5:27,28 he will judge our thoughts!
    - According to 1 Corinthians 4:5 he will judge our motives!
    - According to Matthew 12:36-37 he will judge our words!
    - According to Revelation 20:11-15 he will judge our actions!
  + Isaiah gives a vivid illustration of how God sees our attempts to be righteous on our own. The term “filthy rags” is quite strong. The word filthy is a translation of the Hebrew word iddah, which literally means “the bodily fluids from a woman’s menstrual cycle.” The word rags is a translation of *begged*, meaning “a rag or garment.” Therefore, these “righteous acts” are considered by God as repugnant as a soiled feminine hygiene product. (source: gotquestions.org)
  + When it comes to believing, receiving, and sharing the Good News of Jesus, the idea that “sins cannot be removed by good deeds” sets Christianity apart from all other religions. Most religions agree that there is a problem with humanity that needs to be fixed, the difference is in how to fix it.
    - In Mormonism it’s the Laws and the Covenants
      * Mormons in the mud….
    - In Hinduism salvation is achieved in one of 3 ways: the way of works, the way of knowledge or the way of devotion.
    - In Buddhism it’s the Four Noble Truths
    - In Islam it’s the Five Pillars of Islam
    - There’s a ladder to heaven or paradise or Nirvana or wherever in EVERY world religion, except Christianity.
      * Christianity doesn’t offer a ladder, but a cross.
  + The solution for our sin problem is *not trying but trusting*. Truly trusting Jesus to save us starts with giving up on trying to save ourselves, and take him at his Word.

Illustration: For me that work that I tried to do was confession of my sin…confess…curse…confess…curse….a spiritual OCD cycle of frustration…walking forward to be baptized…confession was that ladder I was trying to climb…the problem is that, spiritually speaking, that ladder extended forever and I had no limbs. I finally got tired of falling off and turned to Jesus.

* + For those of you who are unbelievers (put your faith in Jesus)
  + For those of you who are believers (the same faith that saves you sanctifies you…works are an outflow of faith)
  + Refuse to be legalistic
  + When we try to gain favor with God or impress others by doing certain things (or avoiding them) without regard to the condition of our hearts before God, that’s called legalism. Legalism is when we

take the grace that God offers for FREE, and add a FEE. Legalism and self-righteousness are sins themselves that are very displeasing to God. The only way to please the Lord and produce good works is by relying on the presence of Christ in our lives.

* + And now we get to do good deeds as believers, not because we have to in order to get to heaven but because we are grateful we are going there. Good works flow out of faith. I want to finish the passage in Ephesians 2:8-10, *““For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.* *For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*.”

In the 1991 movie City Slickers, Mitch (Billy Crystal) is on a Baby Boomer cattle drive in search of the real meaning of life. In one scene he is out riding with the gritty trail boss, Curly (Jack Palance). Curly realizes why Mitch is on the trip and confronts him with it. When Mitch asks what the meaning of life is, Curly holds up one finger and says "This". Mitch asks what that means. Curly told him, that it is one thing. With great anxiety of finally finding out what "The One Thing" is, Mitch askes what is the "One Thing." Curly’s reply - "That’s for you to figure out." Deep theology there. Curly was the unlikely angel that leads Mitch, to look for the “One Thing” in his life that’s missing.

There’s one thing for you to figure out as your calling but many, many good works God has created you for.