

Sin, Jesus, and Changed Lives

2020-01-26

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Previously, I talked about our problem with sin. The fact is that all of us are sinners and we all deserve the punishment for sin: Death. Of course, overcoming death is a big problem. In spite of humanity's many problems like Crime, Disease, Hate and War, Poverty, Murder, Sexual immorality, no problem or issue is bigger than death.

Death is the biggest problem or issue ever known to humanity. Death is too big for even the most capable surgeon or doctor. Scientists like Einstein or other Geniuses could not defeat death. Even the most religious and seemingly righteous person in the World, has never defeated death.

But, there was One—The One. That One is Jesus of Nazareth. That One is *the* Righteous One. He is more than a man, he had to be. The One who suffered a horrible death at the hands of religious leaders and powerful conquerors, it was He who conquered death by His perfect sacrifice.

Jesus lived a perfect, righteous life. In all things, Jesus was blameless and holy. He followed all of God's commands and statutes/laws without fault. And, though his mother Mary was a human, like us, a young handmaiden from the hills of Israel, His Father was the eternal Father, from the beginning, by the Holy Spirit.

It was because Jesus was human, like you and me, that He could become a perfect substitute for us and take the just punishment of *our* sin—death. Yet, because His Father was the eternal One, the Ancient of Days, only Jesus could overcome death through the power of His righteousness and sinless life.

To help set the stage for next week's question of the Holy Spirit, I made the case last week that Jesus was more than a good teacher. Jesus was even more than a good man because, Jesus is also God. I noted the words of two of the most significant Biblical authors: John— an Apostle and close disciple of Jesus—and the Apostle Paul—to whom Jesus appeared personally on the Road to Damascus after His resurrection.

I especially appreciate John and Paul for these reasons: John was very close to Jesus. He is described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". John was with Jesus every step of the way; at the Mount of Transfiguration seeing Jesus transformed brighter than the sun with Moses and Elijah as witnesses; on the Sea of Galilee, John watched Peter step out of the boat and walk on water (well, sort of); John was even at the foot of the cross to hear Jesus' last words and to become a surrogate son to Jesus' mother, Mary. Further, John, while on the Isle of Patmos, had the most amazing encounter with the

risen Christ: Jesus gave him visions of Heaven that were indescribable, yet John faithfully wrote them down for all generations to ponder.

Now, Paul, on the other hand, was one of the most highly regarded young religious leaders in Israel. He personally directed the persecution of Jesus' followers, seeking to bring back followers of "the Way" in chains to be killed, like the first martyr Stephen. You may remember in Acts 7 where the coats of those stoning Stephen to death, were laid, approvingly, at Paul's feet. Yet, unlike John, who followed Jesus as a beloved disciple, Paul hated Believers and thought Jesus was a fraud. Then, one day, on the way to persecute Believers, Paul met Jesus! After that, the Church's chief persecutor became the Church's chief Evangelist, to the point of his own persecution, poverty, peril, and, eventually, execution.

What inspired both of these men: John followed Jesus throughout His ministry to live for Jesus into old age, despite the hardships caused by religious leaders and secular culture. While, Paul was transformed from vilest persecutor to greatest advocate of Jesus, sharing the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ to the ends of the Earth, until his early death. We owe Paul for essentially starting the Church outside of Jerusalem, reaching down to us today!

I think that the answer is the same for them, and for each and every true Believer in Jesus: It is the Holy Spirit who testifies to Jesus; The Holy Spirit convicts us regarding sin; He empowers us to speak Truth; the Holy Spirit upholds us throughout our lives and, regardless of circumstances, inspires us all to live for Jesus, no matter the cost. The Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary to live for Jesus!

So, who or what is the Holy Spirit? Why do we need Him? What does He do? And, how do we get the Holy Spirit?

We will discuss more about the purposes for which God gives His Holy Spirit next Sunday.

Let us pray...