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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 3, 2021, 2021
3rd Midweek Lent

Responsive Reading: Psalm 103:1-14

Passion History: Judas Betrays Jesus

Hymns: 156; 342; 157; 653

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 1 John 1:7-9

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Words have meaning.

All too often we find ourselves reciting words without giving the words much thought. It happens easily when it is a pledge, like the Pledge of Allegiance, a prayer, such as one of our table prayers, or the Lord's Prayer, or a confession, like the Apostles Creed. Our brain goes on autopilot, and the words flow from our mouths, and we aren't thinking about what we are saying.

With our midweek Lenten meditations we have for many years used Luther's explanation to the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed as our confession, with the goal of this statement leading us to a more thoughtful profession of our faith. But then we may find ourselves saying these words as automatically as the main creed they are expounding.

In our midweek meditations this year we are examining the truths expressed by Luther in this part of the Small Catechism, that we might be edified, or built up in our faith, and in our appreciation of the blessings that come to us in Jesus' sufferings and death, and then on Easter morning, what we profess regarding the joyous event of Jesus' resurrection.

This evening we consider the miracle of grace that is presented for our consideration in the phrase "Purchased and won me from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil." Last Wednesday we focused on how Jesus redeemed us, and how that concept speaks of paying a price, that He purchased us, and won us. This evening we move to the next words considering the impact of this redemption on sin's hold on me. May the Spirit open our hearts to rejoice in the truth that --

THEME: He Set me Free from All Sin.

I. It is about Possessing Faith

That we profess our faith in Jesus is not a matter of little consequence. It makes all the difference in the world. You see faith is a great deal more than reciting words. We already talked about words having meaning. When these words are the truth of the gospel, and when these words have a home in our hearts as well as in our minds, these words also have power. They are a determining force in how we live our lives. So our text begins:

1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

Walking in the light means living in the light of the gospel. Knowing not only that there is a God, but who that God is, and how He has revealed Himself to us in truth and grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. On that night on which He was betrayed Jesus said: "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" (John 14:6) Knowing Jesus as the only begotten Son of God who came down to earth as our Savior to bring us to God, leads us in our path of faith and life. We are then living our lives in the light of God's truth, not in the darkness of sin and death. That brings us to the focal point of this evening's meditation: "He set me free from all sin!"

For that to be true --

II. We Need to Reject Mistaken Notions about Sin.

The first mistaken notion is the most flagrant lie of our sinful flesh. The sinful flesh says, “Not ME! I’m not the sinner here! As a pastor I have heard that many, many times. It is something that the impenitent will say, while at the same time angrily charging me with the sin of being judgmental for addressing their sinful behavior. But this is something one might hear from children as well. Even in catechism instruction class after class will demonstrate that the first inclination of the sinful flesh is to deny guilt. We will try to deny sin and guilt even when caught red-handed in a sin. One might protest, “But there were good reasons why I did this, so it is not so bad as to be a sin!” That has to be rejected out of hand. It is nonsensical. Our text tells us straight out:

1 John 1:8 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

We say we have no sin! Who do we think we’re fooling? People that are close to us may say something to the effect that we are not “that” bad. What does that mean? It means that we are at least somewhat bad. It means that we are sinners. We aren’t deceiving the people that know and love us. They know we sin.

We certainly are fooling God. He knows our every act, our every word, indeed, God knows our every thought! The Lord knows that we are sinners. Denying our sin does not convince God. “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*”

(Galatians 6:7)

What does the Spirit tell us in our text: “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*” (v.8) That’s it! We deceive ourselves, and no one else. We deceive ourselves and the truth of the gospel is not in us. That wondrous message that we confessed this evening is just empty words if we hold to the lie that we have not sinned, that we have no sin of which to repent, and no guilt plaguing our conscience. In the end, sin has us enslaved, and we are in denial that ends in disaster.

Thanks be to God we --

III. Know the Certainty of God’s Forgiveness!

The closing verse of our text is the noting less than a blessed assurance of being set free from sin.

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.”

Through the message of the law the Spirit leads us to the harsh reality of our sin and guilt. There is nothing left for us other than to humble ourselves before the Lord and confessing our sins, pleading for His mercy and grace.

This is when “the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son,” makes all the difference. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, that was shed for us upon the cross as the satisfying payment for our sins. That payment set aside the wrath of God forevermore.

Here is the marvel of the gospel. God devised the perfect plan to set us free from sin, from all sin. God made it so that He, who by divine nature is holy and just in all His ways, has no choice but to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. How can He do that? The all-atoning sacrifice of Jesus makes it happen. The debt of sin has been paid. We confess our sins, and God is faithful to forgive!

In spite of how unfaithful we have proven to be, that time and time again we fall back into sin, sometimes slipping into sin before we even realize it is happening, but at other times knowing what we are doing is sin, but sin drives us on in anger or desperation, before we can stop its dreadful pull! And we fall before the Lord and once again confess our sin, and each and every time, for the sake of Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins, God is FAITHFUL to forgive!

What is even more amazing in this gospel is that God is JUST to forgive. He forgives because it is the right thing for God to do! Having laid on Jesus “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6) God has left Himself no other option than to forgive the penitent sinner! By faith the penitent sinner lays hold of that payment made by Jesus on the cross; the penitent sinner looks with faith to Jesus as Savior from sin, and God forgives the penitent sinner.

And God is thorough in His forgiveness. He forgives us our sins and cleanses us of all unrighteousness, **ALL** unrighteousness! We are holy and righteous and clean before God. He declares it to be, and it is so!

As we profess our faith in Jesus and say those words that we said again this evening, “He has redeemed me a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin,” take that gracious truth into your heart and hold it there, knowing that this is eternal life!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.