

My Life Without Sin

John 1

11-1-09

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In the last two sermons we preached on the Logos -- the reason. The reason became flesh like music becomes a dance. When we surrender our reason to God's reason, we enter a dance and the dance is life and love.

For the last two sermons we've preached on John's prologue, John 1:1-1:18. But if you were paying attention, you may have noticed that we skipped some verses. In the midst of what's coming, John talks of what's been: John the Baptist, whom Jesus called "the greatest of those born of women." John was the pinnacle of the Old Testament.

John 1:6-7 "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. John bore witness about him, and cried out, "this was he of whom I said, he who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me."

John 1:19 "and this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'who are you?' He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' And they asked him, 'what then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' And he answered, 'No.'

[They asked him about these famous Old Testament prophecies and figures. It's interesting that Jesus (Luke 7:28) said that among those born of women there is none greater than John. He's like the pinnacle of Old Testament holiness, greater than Abraham, Moses, and David. Yet not even worthy to untie the sandal of one who's coming--and that was a job for slaves.]

So they said to him, 'who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said.' (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, 'then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.' These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing."

John baptized with water, but he prophesied that the one coming would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He said this to the Pharisees (Matthew 3:11). For then the baptism would burn, and yet for others a baptism would be intoxicating. People

would think they were drunk with wine when they were baptized with the Spirit -- baptized with wine was a euphemism for drunkenness. It reduces you to asking like a child.

But now John is baptizing with water for repentance (Matthew 3:11 and 3:6). So people are coming to John confessing their "hamartia," their sins.

"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

"Make straight in the desert a highway for God."

Comb your hair and brush your teeth.

"I am that I am" is coming--the logos, the reason, the foundation of all, the judge of all is coming.

John 5:22 "all judgment has been given to the Son."

John 9:39 Jesus says, "for judgment I came into the world."

So John the Baptist cries "repent for the kingdom of God is at hand."

"Make straight."

"every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill made low."

"Repent" for as Paul says "we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." So then each would give an account of himself to God (Romans 14:10,12).

We each must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. We each must give an account—a logos—to God.

[My life scorecard is given to everyone in attendance. It's a card used during the sermon]

Under your seat you should find a golf pencil and a card that says "My Life." It's just a little tool to help you examine your life and give account. On the left, you'll see the heading, "WHAT I WANT TO BE." Underneath, I want you to write your goals from ten years ago. If you're under twenty, write your goals from five years ago. You may not have written them down -- but you had them. It might be something like this:

Ethical goals:

I want to stop drinking so much.

I want to stop looking at pornography.

I want to give more of my money to others.

I want to sacrifice myself for my family and friends

It doesn't have to be exact, but everyone write something—two somethings.
Every head bowed every hand writing.

Relational goals:

I want to meet regularly with three close friends.

I want to spend more time with my children.

I want to stay married and for my kids to like me.

I want everyone to like me because I'm not a people pleaser.

Career goals:

I want a promotion.

I want to make six figures.

I want to write books.

I want to pastor a large church where everyone is happy.

Personal goals:

I want to lose weight and get in shape.

I want to learn how to play an instrument.

I want to go on a mission trip.

I want to earn a college degree.

Faith goals:

I want to read my Bible every day.

I want to walk in the joy of the Lord.

I want to forgive everyone, the way I've been forgiven.

I want to look like Jesus.

What I want to be.

Now on the right, under "WHAT I AM" take account of how you're doing: one being poor and 10 being perfect. Give yourself a score.

Now on some of these that's kind of hard. Like, I want to stop looking at porn. I mean what's porn? Underwear ads or Penthouse magazine?

And I want to look like Jesus. I mean no one really looks like Jesus, so I find it helpful to compare myself to others.

So the more friends I have addicted to porn, the higher my score. The less folks around me look like Jesus, the more I do look like Jesus relative to them. See it's a real problem to have too many folks looking like Jesus.

Well grade yourself. Give yourself a score for each category. Add those together then divide by ten. Just move the decimal point. Now that's your score on your "MY LIFE" scorecard. Plot that score on the target on the right. If you get a ten you get a bull's-eye. If you get a five for instance put an X on the 50's ring. And color in the inner five rings.

That's your judgment of the size of your failure. In Greek, the size of your "hamartia." That is your sin. "Hamartia" literally means "to miss the mark." Now folks disagree over what exactly the mark is. Yet I haven't met a person that didn't believe there was a mark. In other words, everyone uses the word should -- I should,

you should, we should. You should on me, I should on you, and we all should on ourselves. My life is a pile of should.

It's like, to be human is to should on yourself and everyone around you. It is to have "the knowledge of good and evil," the knowledge of the mark and "hamartia"--sin.

To be human is to know you should be something, and you're not. Trying to be that something is what most religion is: a lot of goals and some guilt so you'll try harder. See everybody is religious.

If the list of goals is your own list, it's your own personal religion. However, no list of goals is simply your own list. We all have faith that some things are good, and that we should all know what good is.

Well, God is good. So every list of goals is a reflection of God's goals, and that is to make us in his image -- make us good, for God is good. If we try to make ourselves good, we need His list--"the knowledge of good and evil."

While every list of life goals is a reflection of God's list whether you write your own personal list, get Stephen Covey's list, or have a list handed to you by a judge or a preacher. Most people think one religion is better than another because one has a better list than another. A list we call law -- God's goals equals God's law.

Many think Christianity is best because our list is best. Because we have one new law: faith.

But that's confusing, so we hire preachers to tell us what faith means:

Read your Bible,
Say your prayers,
Give money,
The Big Ten and we try super hard to have faith.

In John's day, most preachers and pastors were known as scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees have a bad name today, but upon close examination, they were probably the group that looked most like us American Christians. I mean they went to great lengths to explain what was good and faithful and then they tried really, really hard to be good. They were the spiritual superstars of their day -- if not in everyone's mind at least in their own.

But Jesus said "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter the kingdom." Jesus said "you must be as perfect as our heavenly father is perfect."

You know Jesus was the perfect image of God. He is the mark. We crucified the mark, and with every sin we pound the nails. If you say you have no sin, John tells us the truth is not in you. You're living a lie and that is sin itself.

Color in the whole circle.

Well, we each have a "MY LIFE" scorecard. One far more complicated than this, and we keep it in our head and in our heart. We lie to ourselves constantly, or should on ourselves constantly desperately trying to hide our sins or eliminate our sins -- to get rid of that spot. It's everything you regret in the past and fear in the future -- shame over sin, destruction by sin, a slave to sin. Humanity is infected with sin and doomed by sin to die. "The day you eat of it," said God "you will surely die."

John 1:28, they were confessing, exposing their sins. "These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing."

Bethany means "house of depression and misery." It's just across the Jordan from the promise.

John 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, after me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. And I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God."

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." I know very few people that believe that with their mind. I don't think I know anyone that believes that completely in their heart, for if they did, they'd be like "other worldly;" for in their world there would be no "hamartia" -- no sin. In fact, sin would have no substance. It literally would not compute. It would not be reckoned; it would not be recorded. It could only be counted as nothing--if it were encountered at all. It might feel like a something -- like a punch in the ribs. It might feel like something, but be counted as nothing

Speaking of her famous vision Julian of Norwich said, "but I did not see sin: for I believe it has no sort of substance nor portion of being, nor could it be recognized were it not for the suffering which it causes."

"Behold the Lamb of God"

The Lamb. In the Gospel of John, John goes out of his way to point out that Jesus was crucified just as millions of lambs were being slaughtered in the temple for Passover.

Passover commemorated the night before the Israelites left bondage in Egypt. When the messenger of death passed over every Israelite home where lamb's blood was smeared upon the door. They were saved from death in bondage by the blood of the Lamb, then one generation later, crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. John the Baptist must have been thinking of the Passover lamb and he also must've been thinking of the sacrificial lambs.

John's father was a priest and so John was to be a priest [Exodus 29:38-42]. Every day the priest offered two lambs in the temple like Abraham offered the lamb in the same spot two thousand years before. The idea was that the burnt offering might take away sin, yet it was only a shadow of one who would take away sin.

John had just quoted Isaiah 40, this is Isaiah 53

5: "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities"

6: "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"

7: "Like a lamb led to slaughter"

10: "It was the will of the Lord to crush him ... his soul makes an offering for sin"

The Passover lamb, sacrificial lamb, the suffering servant lamb, and in John's day they dreamed of one other lamb: the apocalyptic conquering Lamb.

In the Revelation, John sees the lamb standing on the judgment seat of God as if it had been slain" (Revelation 5:13).

"Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and the sea and all that is in them" praising the Lamb.

It's like he really did take away the sin of the world. Many say, "Well it's not the sin of the WHOLE world."

He died for all without distinction but not without exception. Imagine if I came home and said to my four kids "I'm taking my family to Hawaii." They'd be thrilled and all start packing. And then imagine if I said to one, "what are you doing?" "I'm packing for Paradise." And I said, "well I'm not taking you." "But you said all". Yes "all" without distinction (boy or girl) but not without exception – you.

They argue that John meant to say, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away SOME sin of the world." But that's not what John the Baptist said, and I don't think that's what John the disciple heard.

In 1 John 2:2 he wrote, "Jesus Christ is the propitiation [the atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

John the Baptist pointed out sins (he was the pinnacle of the Old Testament), and John the disciple proclaimed that sin had been taken away. He preached the gospel, a baptism of fire.

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

When does the Lamb of God take it away?

First Corinthians 5:7, "Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed."

And those temple sacrifices ended with the death of Christ, and that's what Isaiah prophesied when he wrote "the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

In John 12, Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world [that's the accuser -- Satan] be cast out, and when I am lifted from the earth will draw all people to myself."

John 19:28,30 "knowing that all was now finished, Jesus said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and give up his spirit."

Wow! What if he really did?

All would be forgiven. There would be unlimited do-overs. Mulligans for all. No one could fail, no one could lose—losers would win. The last would be first, and the poor would be rich. Debts would be canceled like the year of Jubilee. Unlimited do-overs. Everyone would be born again and again and again.

I can think of no better news -- right?
And I can think of no more offensive news.

Imagine the Broncos playing the Colts. It's tied with 3 seconds left, and the Colts attempt a 50 yard field-goal and miss. But the referee (the judge) says "I forgive you. Try again." If that happened, the ref would be crucified, and the stadium destroyed as all hell broke loose on Mile High.

If you're really into winning at golf, but there are unlimited Mulligans, you can never win. You are forever frustrated.

I mean if losers are winners, then winners are losers (at least until they stop keeping score).

If the last are first, the first are also last.

If all debts are canceled, you don't owe anything. But nobody owes you anything either. If you're a banker, that's frustrating.

And get this: Nothing is more offensive than "being born again" because you're born again as a baby. You spend your entire life striving not to be a baby or a little child. Your entire life shoulding on yourself so you can grow up and be the thing you think you should be. Your life is like that scorecard. So if your sins are taken, away your life is taken away. To be forgiven is to die -- game over.

"All is forgiven."

There is no better news, and there is no more scandalous, offensive, and insulting news.

So if the truth be told, most people don't want the Lamb to take away ALL the sin of the world -- just one or two sins of their own, which sounds kind of sinful.

It's no wonder the Pharisees had such a hard time with this. They had a hard time with John the Baptist because he acted like they had sinned. He baptized good Jews as if they were pagans. As if all were guilty.

And they really had a hard time with Jesus because He acted like the sins of the world had been taken away, as if all were forgiven. In John 8, they throw a woman at Jesus's feet. She was caught in adultery and Jesus says, "Let him who is without sin throw the first stone." No one does. All are guilty. Then he looks at her and says, "I don't condemn you" as if he's taken away the sin of the world.

The Pharisees were furious! Why? They're keeping score! And they think they're winning the game. And Jesus keeps handing out mulligans.

The Pharisees get furious and in verse 14, Jesus says, "You judge according to the flesh."

In other words you take God's law and make more laws and then you try and fulfill those laws in the energy of the flesh. And then you judge the flesh by the flesh.

In other words you take fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and you try to make yourself with yourself into the image of God and then you judge yourself by judging others in the place of God.

In other words you live by keeping score.

You see, these "MY LIFE" scorecards aren't just a record of sin. This record of sins is sin. It's the "fruit of the knowledge of good and evil" stolen from the tree. You're "MY LIFE" scorecard is your ticket to death and hell. It's the evidence that you crucified the judge and then tried to take his place. The essence of sin is trying to be God -- the judge. The scorecard isn't just a record of sin -- it is sin.

Now you may be thinking, "Great. I come to church and the preacher makes me sin."

Well, I didn't make you sin, I tricked you into confessing sin because whether or not you have a scorecard in your hand, I know you have one in your head and even your heart. And the higher your score, the more addictive it becomes.

So the Pharisees are trapped in sin, and the sinners are set free from sin -- they're sick of keeping score.

You see, apart from the miracle of grace, you live sin, breathe sin. You think you are sin. So if someone took your sin away, you think you'd die. And that's why it's so hard to believe you're forgiven. If you believed, you'd lose your scorecard -- lose your life, and be born again. But not just born again -- born anew with the new logos, a new way, a new reason for living.

Jesus says to the Pharisees in John 8:15, "you judge according to the flesh; I judge no one."

Then 11 verses later, "I have much to say about you and much to judge."

You see if we follow the Gospel of John closely I think we'll find:
Jesus is the judge who judges our judgment by judging no one.
Jesus is the judge who judges our judgments by giving mulligans to everyone.
Jesus is the judge who judges our judgments with unquenchable grace.
Jesus is the judge who judges our judgments by judging no one but himself in our place.

God judges all our judgments with the lamb who takes away the sin of the world. In other words, "Jesus Christ and him crucified is the judgment of all things."

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus says to the Pharisees in 8:15, "I judge no one." Then in 8:23, he says, "I am from above, you are of this world... I told you that you will die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he, he will die in your sins."

"Die in your sin," what sin? The sin of counting sins.
"Die in your sin," but I thought Jesus took away sin?

Will John says he does and even he did. And now this is a wonder that we don't have time to unpack. But in John, there are two ages and two worlds, two life's, two times. This age--this Aion and the Aion, the age to come.
This world and the aionios world--the kingdom of God.
This life and aionios life--eternal life, it means of the age.

Jesus is the door between the two ages. Jesus Christ and him crucified is the judgment between them. In God's age (the kingdom of love, the new creation) All, All, All is forgiven, and like Paul writes, "love keeps no record of wrongs."

Love doesn't 'logizomen'-- reason sin; count sin; reckon sin. Love suffers sin, but love counts sin as nothing. Love is God and love is eternal and love is life. And by believing Jesus we can walk in eternal life now.

But by rejecting Jesus we die in our sins, and actually anyone that rejects him is condemned already. That doesn't mean that Jesus can't take away that sin. Indeed in eternity, he already has, and in time he certainly will. For one day all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ--the cross--in that day, the great judgment of God will burn away all other judgments.

But until that day, they're trapped in this age -- even in death and outer darkness, trapped by a lie to which they are addicted.

And this is the lie: that the Lamb of God did not take away the sin of the world.

They are trapped in outer darkness surrounded by light.

Trapped in this age surrounded by eternity.

Trapped in hell when the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Tracked by the illusion that they are judge.

Trapped by in their self.

Trapped in their sin, of reckoning sin -- counting sin -- reasoning sin.

Trapped in a lie -- a nothing -- for sin is ultimately nothing.

"Behold the Lamb of God has taken it away."

And now we're standing at the edge of great mysteries: time and eternity, hell and heaven, this world and the new creation and the judgment of God. We'll talk about them more later.

But for now I want you to "believe the gospel." Which means I want you to surrender your scorecard. You may say, "oh yeah, I figured as much." Well, the important thing is that you believe this much.

You know I barely even begin to believe. Know how I can tell? I keep looking at my scorecard. I keep judging myself. I love preaching but I really hate preaching. Why? Because it's a line on my scorecard. So it scares the crap out of me. I think it's my life. I love pastoring and I hate pastoring. Why? Because it's a line on my scorecard. And when it's a line, it's a law, and it's like a prison.

We are afraid to believe the gospel of grace. We are terrified to surrender our scorecards because if we don't judge ourselves, who will? If we don't make ourselves in God's image who will?

We are terrified to surrender our scorecards because we don't want to be last, for then how could we be first. We don't want to lose our lives. We don't want to become like little children.

Little children are undisciplined and irresponsible, like they have no knowledge of good and evil. We're terrified to believe the gospel and surrender our scorecards

because if we're not motivated by guilt, shame, and fear we're afraid we won't be motivated by anything at all.

But little children are motivated.

No one learns faster than a little child -- no one. Until we put them in school, give them grades, and teach them to keep score.

Little children play games and don't even bother to keep score.

Little children throw footballs and hit golf balls just for fun.

Little children are undisciplined, irresponsible, undignified, not self-aware, and dance at the drop of a hat.

And "you must become like a child to enter the kingdom," said Jesus.

Last time I ended with the story of a Down Syndrome girl and the severe mercy that freed her to come dance in the autumn leaves, surrendering her reason to God's reason, surrendering her judgment to God's judgment. This time I was reminded of Elam Zook.

What would it be like to live without a scorecard?

What would it be like to feel the pain of sin, and not reckon sin as something but nothing.

Brennan Manning writes of visiting an Amish family with three fully grown severely retarded children -- adult children. Elam was 47. Manning writes:

"When I arrived at noon with two friends Little Elam -- about 4 feet tall, heavy set, thickly bearded, and wearing the black Amish outfit -- was coming out of the barn some 50 yards away. He had never laid eyes on me in his life; yet, when he saw me step out of the car, he dropped the pitchfork and ran lickety-split in my direction. Two feet away, he flung himself at me, wrapped his arms around my neck, his legs around my waist, and kissed the lips with fierce intensity for a full thirty seconds.

Well, I was temporarily stunned and terribly self-conscious. Then he jumped down, wrapped both his hands around my right arm, and let me on a tour of the farm.

A half-hour later, Elam sat next to me at lunch. Midway through the meal, I turned around to say something. Inadvertently, my right elbow slammed into Elam's rib cage. He didn't wince, he didn't groan. He wept like a two-year-old child. His next move undid me.

Elam came over to my chair, planted himself on my lap, and kissed me even harder on the lips. Then he kissed my eyes, nose, forehead, and cheeks.

And there was Brennan, dazed, dumbstruck, weeping, and suddenly seized by the power of a great affection."

It's called love. It's the motive, the logic, the reason of heaven and is also the judgment of God.

For on the night that Jesus (Lamb of God) was betrayed and delivered up by this world, he did not condemn the world but wouldn't stop kissing the world.

He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you," and in the same manner he took the cup saying, "this is the new covenant (new Testament) in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

Surrender your scorecard.
Surrender your judgment to God's judgment.
This is judgment.

Now listen, we must judge sin with God's judgment. Otherwise we wouldn't know that this card is sin or that he takes away sin. We must judge sin, but never sinners.

For Behold, he takes the sin away.

Take bread, dip it in the cup. Then I want you to surrender your scorecard.

You'll see a child to the right of each station. They weren't here for the message. They don't know how to read the card. I want you to hold your card for them face up as they dip their fingers in this wine, and make the sign of the cross on your card.

Then I want you to keep the card. And whenever you feel driven, insecure, arrogant, anxious, proud, or guilty as hell, whenever you start judging, I want you to look at that card and remember:

You've already been judged.
Your certificate of debt is forever canceled.
Your life is hidden in Christ. It's baptized with blood that is fire.
A burning cross condemns your condemnation.
You missed the mark, but the mark didn't miss you.
And the judge of all loves you like Evan Zook love's Brennan Manning.

Indeed he loves you infinitely more, and He won't stop kissing you.

Communion

Benediction

So if you look at your card you'll see a stain. Do you know how much that stain is worth? Do you know what's more valuable than the blood of the only begotten Son of God?

There is nothing more valuable. He's perfect. And He gave you His score. And He's all over and in your life.

Now look at the other people in this room. It's true for them, too. You see when you believe that, it changes everything about the way you think about yourself and you think about them, and the way you act toward yourself and the way you act toward them. And even the way you act towards the people out there. Because I think they have a scorecard, too. God just hasn't revealed it to them yet.

And so my friends, God has revealed to you that you win the jackpot, and He'd like you to tell everybody else. He wants you to believe the gospel and preach the gospel.

Now that doesn't mean that in some sense we don't judge sin. Because if we didn't judge sin with god's judgment, we wouldn't know that there was even a scorecard, or that he took it away. But you see, we can't judge sinners, because He did take it away.

And so in Jesus' name, believe and live. You're free.
Amen.

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