

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is Death and Life, and comes from the Epistle lesson, Galatians chapters 2 and 3. Let us pray... . Amen

Works and Faith, Curses and Blessings, Death and Life. These three pairing resound through Scripture, as heard in the Epistle reading, but we also see and hear about them in daily life.

Yet how important are these three pairs, individually and together. Works and Faith. Well Paul’s whole letter to the Galatians deals with this topic. This was the issue Paul was trying to deal with: Works as opposed to Faith in Christ for salvation. Paul reminded the church in Galatia, “**we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.**” (Gal 2:16) Paul clearly told the church then, as his words continue to resound now, how it is impossible by our works and merit to earn salvation. It just cannot be done. On top of that, our works also do not help keep our salvation. To place our works as a necessity for salvation dishonours Christ and His sacrifice and death. Still, some were trying to teach this to the church in Galatia, as some continue to try to teach this false doctrine today. But Paul is clear, works of the Law DOES NOT save, “**For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**”(Rom 3:20) All the Law does is shows us our sin, and the curse we live in and inherited from Adam.

This leads us to the second pairing: Curses and Blessings. But what are curses really? Well, this is the world we live in. You likely hear about curses, are on the brunt end of them sometimes, or depending on how hard you hit your hand with a hammer, you may also use them yourself. Often, people are desensitized to curses and use them without even thinking about what they are saying, or what is scarier, what they are really saying. To tell someone to ‘go to hell’ or to say ‘dam it’ about something is to request God to eternally send that person to the fires of hell, or that the situation should be eternally condemned to the same punishment the devil and the demons rightly deserve.

But there is a greater curse. A real one. One from which we cannot free ourselves. In the Garden of Eden, our first parents broke God’s Law and sinned. As a result, Adam and Eve completely lost the image of God in which they were created, along with the ability to please God. They sinned and cursed themselves and all of creation. Original sin was conceived and born and we inherited the curse which goes along with it. We too are guilty of sin and rightfully deserve to be punished for our sins. Since Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, people have never since had the ability to please God, apart from Christ, because we are all under the curse.

And here works and the curse come together. Paul tells us and the Galatians, “**For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”**¹¹ **Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law...**”(Gal 3:10-11). If you want to try to rely on the works of the Law to save you, or even to help save you, you curse yourself because “**if righteousness, or our salvation, were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.**”(Gal 2:21)

But Jesus did die. In fact, Jesus’ death is an objective and historical fact.

Jesus died to save sinners because the death Scripture talks about is not metaphorical. The curse Paul talks about is not symbolism. Sin is not allegory. The death Paul talks about is not an illustration.

God put all things under the law. Paul tells us, “**Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.**” (Rom 3:19) God gave the Law to Moses on the stone tablets; God also wrote it on our hearts (Rom 2:15) so no one has an excuse.

But there is a huge problem, at least from our perspective; God’s Law is impossible to fulfill in our sinful flesh. We just cannot do it. Instead of the Law being a divine blessing it is seen from our perspective more as a wrathful curse which brings along with it God’s divine punishment. For even if we could perfectly follow the Law, still no one is justified by keeping the Law. Remember Paul’s words: “¹¹ **Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”**”(Gal 3:11)

Apart from faith in Christ, given and worked by the Holy Spirit through hearing and receiving God’s Word and Sacraments, we are a curse to ourselves if we think that we can keep the law because by doing so, we place ourselves back under the law. The Law is there to reveal our sin.

Sin Kills. Period.

The consequence for breaking the Law is real, actual, and eternal death and separation from God. Sin kills, really and truly. The death Paul talks about is NOT metaphorical, Paul is not using an analogy, he is not using allegory, and he is not using death symbolically, nor is it only an illustration.

Sin kills you dead.

To see the effects of sin on this flesh just walk through a cemetery and read the names on the head stone. Every single body there was a sinner. There is only one way to remove the curse; there is only one time in one’s life when a person does not sin: In Death. There is no other way.

Unfortunately, because of Original Sin, death is also our starting point. In Sin, Original and Actual, ...under that curse, when we were conceived and born of our mothers we were already dead in our trespasses. “**The wages of sin, in Greek-the compensation of sin, is death,**”(Rom 6:23). Death is always the payment for sin. In the Garden of Eden it was the death of some animals which paid for Adam and Eve’s sins. For King David, in the Old Testament reading (2 Sam 12), while he did repent of his sins the consequence for David’s adultery with Bathsheba was the death of his own son. “**Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**”(Heb 9:22)

What your sins deserve is death. All your good works and what the world consider valuable is worthless in God’s eyes and can never earn or buy your forgiveness. Instead, deliverance for the curse and death of your sins comes in a completely different way.

You receive it as a gift of faith, and faith too is a gift from God.

The result of David’s adultery was the death of his son conceived with, and born to, him and Bathsheba. David’s son died, not to pay for the sins of his father but, he died under the same curse David, Bathsheba, Adam, Eve, Samuel, Moses, Joshua, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and every other person who has ever died, died in; the curse of sin and death—in short, life under the Law.

But there was another son of David, one who would come later, and one who would be hailed the King of Israel and the Lamb of God. Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the Son of Adam, the Son of God (Matt 1:1; Lk 3:38). Paul tells us what Jesus did, **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”**(Gal 3:13-14)

Jesus Christ came down and took on our flesh and bones. He also took the curse we rightly deserve and carried it through His life. In the end, and to destroy the curse and tear us from the power or death He took our full compensation for our sins, what we earned, and poured out His blood to wash away the curse. Jesus gave His life to death. Christ objectively in history gave His life in your place so He could bless you with the release from the power of the curse of sin and death.

And the way He saves you is by killing you. Yes, Christ saves you by killing you, or rather as Paul tells us today, by crucifying you with Himself. God takes your life and buries you with His Son to make you alive in Jesus. Scripture here is not talking metaphorically, symbolically, or allegorically. God is saying you really and objectively are killed. Just as Christ did not symbolically die on the cross, nor does He metaphorically grant you eternal life, neither is your salvation anything other than true objective fact.

When God spoke over you in your baptism you really and truly died in your baptism. God then brought you back to life in His Son Jesus Christ so you can say with Paul, **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**(Gal 2:20) The life we now live is in the baptismal grace we were given. We daily return to our baptism so that ***“the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil desires, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God’s presence.”***(SC, Baptism, fourth) On top of that God continues to come to us through His Word and Sacrament with His forgiveness and strength to face everything this world throws at us.

Christ has redeemed you from the curse of sin, the power of death, and the dominion of Satan by killing you and bringing you back to life. In this action He also grants you faith and trust in Him, He clothes you with His righteousness, and He gives you His real and eternal life. Christ has done every work needed for you salvation and He gives you the faith and trust to cling to Him; Jesus has removed the curse of sin from you through His blessing; and Christ has delivered you from death to eternal life in Him. Thanks be to God in Christ. Amen.

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