

Introduction

"Who are you? Who, who, who, who? I really wanna know. Who are you? Who, who, who, who?" Can someone tell me where you've heard those lyrics? They're in the theme song of the television drama series *CSI*. Their reference point of course is the murder victim in the particular episode you're watching. What they're asking is, **"Who are you who killed this victim?"**

Well, I'd like to prepare our minds and hearts for Holy Week by asking and answering that same question with regard to Jesus. Who are you who killed Jesus? Isaiah 53:4-6 tells us.

All Have Sinned

Isaiah 53 is one of the most celebrated chapters in the entire Bible. It is a Messianic prophecy that foretells the coming and death of Jesus. I'm going to focus on verses 4-6 and what they tell us about His death and our part in it. Let's start with the first two lines in verse 6.

Look at the opening words, **"All of us."** It's estimated that 80 billion people have lived in human history. The words, **"All of us,"** refer to literally each and every one of those, with no exceptions.

The next word, **"like,"** shows that Isaiah is using a figure of speech, a simile, to reveal something about **"all of us."** It's that we, like sheep, have gone astray and have turned to our own way. Sheep have minds of their own and do things that are against the shepherd. In the same way, people have minds of our own and do things that are against God, that is, contrary to His nature and commands. We call that "sinning." Isaiah's message in the first two lines of verse 6, therefore, is precisely the same as Paul's in Romans 3:23. All of us have sinned.

I know I have. Several years ago, someone commented to me that he saw me running the evening before. **"How far did you go?"** he then asked me. **"Five miles,"** I replied. I wanted to impress him though that I was in shape and so failed to mention that I had walked two of those. I

sinned, in other words, because I acted contrary to God's nature (He "cannot lie" – Hebrews 6:18) and contrary to His command ("put aside all deceit – 1 Peter 2:1)).

So, it's true. I admit it. I have sinned – and so have all of you.

Sin Is Serious

Now, many Christians take the sins they've committed quite lightly. It's astonishing in fact how cavalier/casual so many are about so many of their sins. They act contrary to God's nature and commands and don't regret or even think about it at all.

Let's go back to that sin of mine – deceiving the person into thinking I ran five miles instead of three. How big a deal is that really? Most people would say it isn't a big deal at all. Some might go so far as to say I must have psychological problems for even mentioning it.

That's because people naturally judge the seriousness of sins in terms of the harm they do. Consider this. I have never once, in 37 years of marriage, hit my wife because I thought she acted unreasonably. But I have spoken rudely to her because I thought she did. What's the difference. Why would I not even think of doing the first but do the second so readily. It's because I take the first to be far more harmful than the second. That really is the gist of the matter. Christians take many sins lightly because they think it doesn't really matter much that they commit them. It's the idea, "**No harm, no foul.**" People do what I did all the time, deceive a little to impress, and the harm is small. So, it isn't all that big of a deal. Right?

Wrong! It is that big of a deal. We see why it is in the rest of verse 6. Father God has caused our iniquity, our sin, to fall on Jesus. That line summarizes verses 4 and 5, which state the case much more vividly. Jesus bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well being fell upon Him. All of those lines are synonymous parallelisms. They mean the same thing. As Peter states it

in 2:24 of his first letter, Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross.

Jesus was our substitute, in other words, on the cross. You know what a substitute is. It's one person who stands in for another person. That's exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He stood in for us. That means two things. First, He took into Himself all of our sins. And second, He paid the penalty for those sins that we should have paid.

Do you realize what that means? It means that each of our sins put Jesus on the cross. Let's go back to my sin again – the little deception. I've proposed this scenario to you before. Suppose that every person who ever lived never sinned. Also suppose that I sinned only that once. Jesus still would have had to die on the cross – for that sin.

That puts our sins in their larger context. That larger context is the cross, and in that context there are no innocuous sins. Each and every one is a big deal that matters greatly. Why? It's because that one killed Jesus. I'm not trying to be dramatic in saying that. I'm just trying to get us to see the objective truth about every sin that we've ever committed. That sin, whatever it was, killed Jesus.

Consequently, if we judge the seriousness of our sins by the harm they've done, then each one is serious. It's serious because it caused the ultimate harm – the death of God the Son, Jesus.

Yes, our sins are serious and we need to take them that way. We take them that way by doing two things.

Repent

First, we repent. The central message of Jesus, in Matthew 4:17, and John the Baptist, in Matthew 3:2, were precisely the same, "**Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" That's how we take our sins seriously. It's by repenting. That's probably why historian J. Edwin Orr wrote what he did, "**Repentance is the first word of the gospel.**" That's a dramatic statement and it's true.

But repentance isn't just the first word of the gospel for non-Christians. It is for Christians as well. Martin Luther understood that as

well as anyone ever has. Listen to the very first of His 95 Theses that launched the Protestant Reformation: **“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ He willed that the entire life of believers be one of repentance.”** Jesus does will just that – that your entire life and mine be one of repentance. Repentance is the first word of the gospel for us all, and how we take our sins seriously.

Now, this repentance is about four things.

The first is conviction. The Greek word translated “repentance” in the New Testament is “metanoia.” It means literally “change of mind.” That’s what conviction is, a change of mind. The root word of “conviction” is convince.” To be convinced means that one thought or belief replaces another thought or belief. In this case, the thought that is replaced is **“What I’m doing isn’t a sin”** or **“What I’m doing is a sin but not serious.”** The thought that replaces it is **“What I’m doing is a sin”** or **“What I’m doing is a sin and serious because it is.”** When I deceived a little 15 years ago, I realized it was a sin but thought, **“It’s no big deal.”** But when I deceived a little several years ago, I thought, **“It’s a big deal.”** That is a change of mind, conviction.

Repentance is about a second thing, contrition. It isn’t enough for our mind to be changed. Our heart must be as well. The word **“contrition”** means **“deep and humble sorrow.”** Knowing that what we did is a sin and serious, we sincerely regret it. Contrition is the motivational part of repentance that compels us to do what we need to do. People who aren’t contrite, even if they know they’re sinning, won’t confess and consecrate. People who are contrite usually will. After my deception, I felt sorry for it, regretted it. That’s contrition.

The third thing repentance is about is confession. The word the Bible translates **“confess”** is a compound word. It means literally **“to speak the same thing.”** That connotes agreeing with someone. When a criminal confesses, for instance, he’s agreeing with the state that he committed the crime. When a sinner confesses, he’s agreeing with God that he committed the sin. Confession is different in nature than

conviction and contrition are. Those two things are internal and private. Confession, on the other hand, is external and public. We acknowledge our sin to those it harmed and ask forgiveness. Those whom it harmed include God always and first of all and people sometimes and second of all. So, I confessed my deception to God. I actually stated to Him that I purposely deceived that man to impress him. I admitted that doing so is a sin and asked Him to forgive me for it. That is confession.

There's a final thing that repentance is about - consecration. Consecration is commitment. It's committing ourselves heart, soul, strength, and mind to obey where we now disobey. The Hebrew word translated "**repent**" means "**to turn around.**" It's what soldiers call "**an about face.**" We're going in one direction, abruptly turn around, and start going in the opposite direction. That is consecration and involves two things. First, we turn *from* doing a sinful thing *to* not doing it. Or second, we turn *from* not doing a righteous thing *to* doing it. Consecration is a matter of intent. We make and carry out the decision to turn around by either trying or training, which I've explained in detail before. 1 Peter 2:1 commands us to "**put aside all deceit.**" I've made and am carrying out the decision to do that. When I saw the man I deceived again, for instance, I told him that I had given him the wrong impression. I told him that I had only run three of the miles because I wasn't in good enough shape to run five. That is consecration.

So there you have it – the first thing we do to take our sins seriously. We repent.

Receive Forgiveness

There's a second thing we do - receive forgiveness. God promises to forgive our sins if we repent. We need to take it to heart that He does. We need to accept subjectively what He does objectively, forgive us.

Some people commit sins so deplorable they think they can't be forgiven. A man I knew in Akron committed adultery with his sister-in-law while his spouse and hers were at church. He was eventually totally

broken by it and kept saying over and over again that God would never forgive him for doing such a hideous thing. But he was wrong. Think of it in these terms. Each of our sins killed the only utterly innocent, utterly lovely, and utterly competent person who ever lived, Jesus. But Father God forgives us for doing that when we repent.

We see that in Romans 4:25, **“He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”** **“Raised”** refers to Jesus being resurrected. **“Justification”** refers to Father God forgiving our sins. This verse teaches that Jesus’ resurrection is the proof of our forgiveness when we repent. It’s an historical event that proves Father God forgives us for doing the worst thing a person could ever do – killing Jesus. And if He forgives us for doing that, then He’ll forgive us for doing anything else as well.

That’s what I told the man who committed adultery with his sister-in-law. Committing adultery with your sister-in-law isn’t the worst thing you’ve done. As bad as that is, you did something far worse. You, by committing other sins, killed Jesus. But His resurrection proves that Father God forgives you for that if you repent. And if He forgives you for that, then He’ll forgive you for this as well.

So receive forgiveness. Accept subjectively what God does objectively – forgives us

Conclusion

I close the way I began, with a question. Who are you? Who, who, who, who? Many people criticized Mel Gibson’s movie *The Passion of Christ*. It will make Christians anti-Semitic, they said. But it won’t those who understand what I’ve said today. We know the Jews weren’t the only ones who killed Jesus. In a few moments, we’re going to sing an old hymn that asks this. Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Your honest answer and mine is, **“Yes, I was”** – in this sense. It’s our sins that killed Him. So let’s take them seriously by repenting and receiving forgiveness. Who are you? The answer is, **“It’s me.”**