

CCSA - Cornerstone 2010 Devotional #1 – Joseph Whittle

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Discussion Questions: What is injustice? What is your idea of a perfect world?

We have all come to a conclusion: there is something wrong in today's society. So what's wrong with the world we have today?

The Bible tells us that the world God created in the beginning was good. God's creation was incredibly complex yet beautiful and perfect. There was no injustice, no crime, no diseases no death. Adam and Eve were created to care for each other, love each other and live in perfect harmony with each other and with God. But something happened that changed all of this. Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and sin entered the perfect design/paradise. They knew that they had offended God and had gone against the morality that He created – the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong.

Although we can argue morality differs between cultures, I think that everyone has a center point where it is the same. Take the example of the shooting sprees in China, multiple gunman entered public schools on more than one occasion with kids attending class and opened fire killing dozens of children. I think we would all agree that this type of thing is wrong and shouldn't be happening regardless of which culture we belong too.

Another example is the scandals and corruption we see daily by our politicians, corporate executives and even by those we know around us. Like it or not, we are all affected by this immoral nature directly and indirectly. We pay for other people's mistakes and sins (jail).

Now, take a look at your own heart; are you really a good person by what the world deems moral or good? Okay, maybe you haven't stolen anything or done anyone physical harm, but what even telling a simple lie? Stealing or "borrowing" something from a friend? Cheating someone or on a test? If not any of those things, then maybe we are guilty of selfishness, and greed... You might even say that it is just part of our nature and there's nothing we can do about it. It has been engraved into our hearts - "it's being human". *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? – Jeremiah 17:9 – (cf. Human Nature - 2 Timothy 3)* By just reflecting on our lives and on the world we know, it's a bit obvious that there is something wrong here with the moral attitudes and hearts of the people. The world is polluted with what the Bible calls sin. This sin has caused the problems that we see today and has also affected our relationship with the Creator. A world that was originally created for good has turned into world that is greedy, corrupt and sinful. – *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – Romans 3:23.*

Let me use this analogy. We all know about the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico... Imagine the ocean before the spill and imagine it as the perfect world created by God. God commands us not to get it dirty and keep it clean or else he will judge and punish

us. Imagine that we are swimming in the ocean and God is there with us enjoying the water. Now introduce sin into the world (Adam and Eve - *Genesis 3*), a bit of oil is poured into the water. We pollute the water and become covered in it which leads to it spreading and everything being covered in oil (sin). Soon the ocean becomes black and oily due to all the sin that accumulates and spreads.

The imagery of the oil spill has a lot of parallels to what the Bible tells us about how we got to where we are today:

- 1) The oil or the sin pollutes our relationship with God, in that He is perfect and holy, and cannot stand even an inkling of sin. (Lev 22:3). God's very nature is the opposite of sin. He can have nothing to do with it. Our relationship is ruined and we are to this day facing the consequences of being separated from Him. Even if it was only one drop of oil! God demands perfection.
- 2) We reach a point where we can't clean ourselves because once the oil covers us; we keep spreading it all over. There is no way for us to purify ourselves; we are doing more damage than good.
- 3) Not only does sin spread, there is a lasting pollution due to it. Back to the example at the Gulf of Mexico, even when the oil is finally cleaned up, there will be forever remnants of the spill. All the animals were killed, all the people's homes/beaches ruined by the contamination. The same here with our relationship with God. There are permanent effects and consequences to sin.

Just focusing on the second point, much like not being able to clean ourselves of all the muck and mess of oil over us, we can't clean ourselves of our sin through the means of good acts, or being morally good because there is something fundamentally wrong with our polluted hearts. One sin entered the world; it contaminated our hearts, our bodies, our minds and even our physical world. Just as we would not ever be able to completely rid ourselves of being immersed in oil, we cannot come before God on our own merits to cleanse ourselves of sin because it is futile. (James 2:20 – deeds without faith is useless)

“For the wages of sin is death...” this is the beginning of Romans 6:23. God's message to Adam was that if he sinned, he would surely die. So the wage or the cost of sin is death. Someone has to die in order to satisfy the judgment of God.

When God sees us, he sees the sin even if it is a spec. The oil, as it were, will sink us to our graves. And the consequences of sin are infinitely harsher than just being tainted with oil. The Bible tells us that punishment for sin is harsh, because we have wronged our Creator, who is perfect, holy and just and who created us to be holy as well. The judgment God will have on us because of sin is His wrath coming upon us, and eternal separation from God.

So if we can't cleanse ourselves completely of the oil spill, if we can remove the taint of sin thoroughly embedded throughout our lives, what can we do?

The second half of Romans 6:23 tells us, "...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"

See, the story doesn't end here. God promised through the Bible that He would send someone to die in our place, to take upon himself the punishment and judgment for sin. Through His grace, He sent someone that would relate in our humanity, and who should share in our day-to-day experiences. This person would be like us, feel joy, pain, and suffering. Except this person would not be a slave to this world and sin, He would be free from it. He would be the substitution in our lives, the payment for sin, the only one that could free us of sins grip.

I'm talking about Jesus Christ. Who was this person that has drastically changed the world for the past 2000 years? Some say a good man and others a prophet. Who do you say He is? When Jesus answered one of His closest followers Peter this question, his answer was "Jesus, you are my Lord!" Peter understood by what Jesus had said and done, and what He ultimately would show by dying on the cross innocently and then rising from the grave, that Jesus was who He said He was – not merely a good man nor a prophet, but the Saviour that the world so desperately needed.

The water is dark and we are floating in it. A light shines and Christ appears, white as snow and splashes into the oily water. He reaches out to you, touches you and quickly becomes covered in the oil, and the oil is being drawn to Him. Your oil, my oil comes off our bodies and is removed and is placed onto His body. We become white and clean while He is overcome with our oil, our sin. He bears it all, the entire world's sin. Christ dies with the burden of OUR sin on His shoulders.

Christ died for you and me. He was judged for you and me. When God comes to judge us for the sin we have committed, He sees Christ's sacrifice, and His righteousness in place of our own. (Romans 4:19-25) Our own merits are meaningless and it's only through Christ that our relationship is restored to God; we can now have a personal relationship with our Lord. It's a gift given freely from God and all you need to do is ask. But in accepting this gift, we are to change, and to give our lives to Christ and start a new life in Him. We are committed to Him, to live lives apart from this sinful polluted world (Romans 12:1-2). We are to cast off our idols – things we worship and value and place Christ first above all by following Him (Mark 8:34). It's a commitment, and it's one that we cannot afford to take lightly.

This is the wonderful message that Christians have to tell – that in God's mercy there is hope to be saved from sin and the judgment for sin by placing our belief, our faith in Jesus Christ – who He was and is, and what He did for us by dying a horrible death, in our place.

Introduction to the season/theme of the year "The commitment line"