

Dear friends in Christ,

I am so glad you are here this evening. What we're about to talk about is so important, it's literally life and death. Eternal life and eternal death. What we talk about today is the very heart and core of our Christian faith. In fact, if there was someone that would or could go to only two worship services in the entire year, and you pressed me to pick which two... I'd make it tonight, and Easter Sunday. From these two services, you learn the essential teachings of the Christian faith. So give me your undivided attention for the next 15 minutes.

Today we're going to focus primarily on just two verses of the Bible. Psalm 130, verses 3 and 4. Verse 3 says, "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?"

Can you just imagine your divine scorecard of sins and offenses against the almighty God? What if there was a list of every single thing you ever did wrong.

It would include things you did that you shouldn't have... like mouthing off to one of your parents, cheating on a test, lying on your tax return. It would include things you didn't do but should have, like not encouraging your kids when they did well, or not calling or visiting your parents as often as you should, or not working your hardest when you're at work.

That list would include all things you have said that were wrong. When you put your foot in your mouth. When you said something out of anger. When you gossiped.

That list would include the things you thought that were wrong. Lust. Greed. Discontentment. Hatred.

How long would your list be? How many sins would God count up just from one day of your life? On God's list would be things like: You got up and grumbled about the forecast for rain. You stubbed your toe and took my name in vain. You failed to thank me for the food you ate. You couldn't find even 10 minutes for me in prayer and Bible study. That person who took your parking spot? They didn't realize you wanted to go there. Your anger was not what I wanted to see. Although your employer paid you for a fair day's work, you didn't give it. You were so impatient with your kids today. Or... you failed to discipline your child. Why aren't you teaching them?! Why didn't you show love for your spouse today? You bought that thing for yourself because you're worth it, but your offerings to me are a pittance... because I'm not worth it?

You get the idea, right? "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" And we tend to justify ourselves or ease the guilt by saying things like, "Well, nobody's perfect. Everyone's a sinner. You would've done the same thing in my shoes. Everybody does it." That's no solution. This doesn't remove guilt! We must acknowledge that if left to our own devices and solutions and efforts, we could not stand before God in judgment. We would be cast from his presence forever. We would be isolated from the one who is the source of all that is good for all eternity! But God says, "The soul that sins, it shall die." "The wages of sins is death."

What we need... what we desperately need, is our record of sin removed so that we can stand. So here is the solution. The solution is not found in a philosophy or ideology. The solution is in historical facts. Our record is cleared because of something that happened in Palestine about 2,000 years ago.

The solution is not found in a self-help book, or with steps and instructions for change. "Do this. Think that. Change. Improve. Try. Go to the next level." And your record of sin will be removed. No. That doesn't cut it. Our efforts fall short. Not only can we not erase our past record, but we can't even stop adding to it on a daily basis.

Our help doesn't come from us. Our help comes from the Lord. And our help comes in the form of a person: Jesus Christ. He is the true Son of God from eternity who became man. He came and lived in Palestine some 2000 years ago to do something about our record of guilt. And today we recall and meditate on the historical facts of what he did to clear our record.

In the 7 readings that we're about to hear from the Gospels, we will see what was necessary to clear our record. It required the suffering and death of the innocent Son of God. To clear our record, Jesus had to receive the full punishment that our blemished record deserved. God's justice doesn't allow him to simply sweep our sins under the rug. And so we will hear the history of our sins forgiven.

Make no mistake, the punishment was severe. "Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins!" We can't let that roll off our lips this evening without thinking about the severe nature of this punishment.

Because Jesus took the blame for our wrongs, he allowed himself to be captured... betrayed by one of his own disciples. He was silent before his accusers. He admitted to the one thing that would mean his death: Being Christ the King, the Son of God. Jesus beaten by a mob of men. They mocked him, spat upon him. We must imagine his face bruised and bloodied from the abuse. Under Pilate, Jesus was declared innocent several times. He was pushed off to Herod where he was mistreated some more. He has a crown of thorns pressed into his head. He was beaten more. Back with Pilate, although he thought he was innocent, ordered Jesus scourged. Scourging was such a serious punishment, it often killed people. Tied to a post or fixed to a large stone, two soldiers would handle made out of wood, multiple straps of leather coming out. At the end would be a ball made of metal or stone. That would bruise the back on impact... or tenderize it, if you will. Also attached to the each strip of leather were hooks, usually made of metal. Without going into too much gory detail, you can imagine the result of such a torture device when the back of a human being was whipped in such a way. The damage to skin and deep tissue was horrific. Some would die from this.

Pilate hoped this severe punishment would satisfy the people, and they would let him go, but they called for his crucifixion, and Pilate caved. Jesus would have carried the cross bar of the cross out to the place of execution. Think railroad tie, probably weighing around 100 lbs. When he could bear it no longer, Simon of Cyrene was picked out of the crowd to bear it for him. At the crucifixion site, Jesus was nailed to the cross... nails piercing the highly sensitive nerve areas

in the hands and feet. The cross was lifted into place and dropped into a hole. And with this began the long, drawn-out process of death by crucifixion. This kind of death was particularly agonizing because it was death by asphyxiation... suffocating. With arms outstretched, it was hard to get a breath of air. The only way to get a good breath was to lift yourself up with your feet... yes, the feet with nails pounded through them. Death by crucifixion was so agonizing, a term for the pain continues even in our English language today: excruciating. Literally, this means: From the cross. Add to this the extreme dehydration Jesus was suffering. And the abandonment of his disciples. The pain was unimaginable.

But as horrible as all of this physical suffering was, we literally cannot imagine the worst of it. Jesus was abandoned by his heavenly Father. In a mystery we can't fully comprehend, the first person of the God head, the Father, abandoned and forsook the second person of the God head, his Son, Jesus Christ. The darkness while on the cross symbolized this. Jesus expressed it when he said, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!" Jesus suffered the pains of hell on the cross.

But the final result is unmistakable. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "It is finished!" This was a cry of triumphant victory. The payment for our sin was complete. Totally complete. There is nothing you add to Jesus' work. His work of salvation is complete. Your forgiveness is accomplished! Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Jesus died and that death means your sin debt is paid in full.

Why did the worst possible thing happen to this perfect man? Why do we call this Good Friday? Why do we call this Good News? Because he did it *for you*. Those two words: for you. Or first person: for me... that's what makes this Friday of death, a very Good Friday. Do you have any sins? Mistakes you've made? Faults? Wrongs? Character flaws? Your record with the law may be clear, but is your record with God clear? You have to admit, along with me: "I haven't lived a good life." But **here's** what this Friday is good. Because you can also say, "But I have a Savior who lived a perfect life! And he suffered for me. He died for me. He was punished for me. So I have the assurance God has not punished me and will not punish me because Jesus was punished for me as a substitute for all my sins.

**If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?**

**But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. Psalm 130, verses 3 and 4.**

Feared because the consequences of sin are frightening. Look at Jesus' death. But feared as in revered, because God is so great and mighty and loving, that he took extreme measures to atone for sin and guilt so that when we come before the judgment throne one day, we will stand, and we will hear him rightly declare: Not guilty! He will say, "With me, there is forgiveness. Because with my Son, there is forgiveness. And I see you stand here with him. I forgive you. I forget your scorecard of sin. Paradise with me is your home." Because of Jesus' death, we leave today with life. Amen.