

'He Knew no Sin' (Good Friday)

by Rev. Robert Griffith

As we gather together in spirit on this Good Friday, I could read any number of Bible passages about the death of Christ. I am sure they are being read millions of times right now across the world. But there is only one verse I want to read to you on this special day and it is perhaps the most powerful theological statement which could be made about the death of Christ and what it means to us. These words came from the Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Church at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 5:21 *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

He (God the Father) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf. There is enough in this one verse to propel a human heart for thousands of years of worship and devotion to God. There is enough here in this one sentence to drive you to serve Christ all the days of your life. What more do we need? We have thousands of sincere people today running here and there looking for 'a word from God.' Well here it is! If only we allowed its truth to burn into the depths of our soul. *"God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf."*

If you were to ask me what was the most spectacular accomplishment of Jesus of Nazareth during His life and ministry, it would not be turning water in wine; it would not be healing the sick; it would not be making blind eyes see or deaf ears hear; it would not be raising Lazarus or Jairus' daughter from the dead; it would not be walking on water, filling fish nets where there were no fish, feeding thousands with so little, casting out demons or calming stormy seas. It would not even be enduring the torture of the cross! If you were to ask me about the greatest achievement of Jesus of Nazareth, I would say here it is:

He knew no sin!

He was born without the taint of sin. He was born without the vile, corrupt, depraved nature that was mine and yours because of man's rebellion from the beginning. He was born without sin *and* He went on to commit no sin. Not only did He commit no sin, but He knew no sin! He didn't experience sin, in the sense of willing participation. He never grabbed hold of sin and it never grabbed hold of Him.

Now you might think, *'That's pretty amazing. He kept the law of God perfectly.'* Yes, He did, but it goes so much further than that – so much deeper than that! You and I know sin very well and so might find this hard to grasp, but I want us to try to get this as we gather on this very special day. Let me explain it this way. Over my many years in ministry I have been asked more than once what I think is the greatest sin. Well, the fact that such a question is even asked demonstrates a lack of understanding of sin and God. How can you say that one sin is greater than another? The first human just bit into a piece of fruit one day and the entire universe was condemned. In the presence of the absolute purity, perfection, righteousness and holiness of God, any sin is fatal for us.

However, if I was to run with this idea of there being a 'greatest' sin, just for the purposes of an illustration, I would probably use common logic and say the greatest sin would be to break the greatest commandment. That makes sense, doesn't it? OK, let's think about this then.

What is the greatest commandment? *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.'*

Therefore, not doing that might be the greatest sin? Now ponder this, if you're brave: there has never been one moment; there has never been one fraction of a moment in your life when you have loved the Lord your God with *all* your heart, *all* your soul, *all* your mind and *all* your strength. There has never been one millisecond in your life when you have loved God as God ought to be loved.

Let that sink in. That one truth alone should be enough to destroy every legalistic, works-based religious thought in us for eternity. The most pious, the most dedicated, the most humble, the most powerful, the most effective Christian servant on this planet has never for even one second, truly loved God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

What a glorious and wonderful revelation! This is great news! It sets us totally free from performing before God and trying to please Him with how we live and to somehow buy His favour and blessing! We just can't do it! Jesus said "*The truth will set you free,*" and *this* truth will set us all free! Think about this. There has never been a time in your life when you did something fully and completely for the glory of God. Not one time! Not even one millisecond of time in the midst of all your good works and service for God, the Church, those in need or this wonderful planet He has given us. Never!

Now that truth is why this verse before us today is absolutely mind-blowing as we now turn away from that revealing look in the mirror and turn towards Jesus of Nazareth. There was not one moment, not one millisecond in Jesus' life when He did not love God as God ought to be loved. There was never a moment when Jesus the man, did not love God with all His heart, all His soul, all His mind and all His strength. Not one moment. Think about that. What you and I and the billions of humans who have walked this earth could never, ever do, not even one of us, not even for a second, Jesus did His entire life! He knew no sin! That's enough for me to think high thoughts about this Man. That's enough for me to listen to everything He ever said and continues to say through His Holy Spirit.

Now many of you have read that verse in Hebrews 4:15 which says that Jesus was tempted like us in every way but did not sin. It is just too easy to read that verse, nod and read on. But we need to park ourselves here longer and realize just how incredible this truth is. Yes, Jesus was tempted in all the same ways we are and didn't sin. But that doesn't mean that we have been tempted the same way that *Jesus* has was tempted when He didn't sin. Let me explain this with a weight-lifting picture:

Here I am - an out of condition old man. Just imagine that you put an Olympic bar on my shoulders right now. I am ok - I can handle that. But next to me is a world champion weight lifter. You put the same bar on his shoulders and he thinks a fly just landed on him! Ok so let's toss a couple of plates on my bar - I steady my legs, straighten my back and I'm ok. Toss the same two plates on his bar - he doesn't even blink. Then two more plates on my bar. Now I can feel the weight. It's ok still, but my back and leg muscles have taken up the strain and I know I'm weight lifting now! Toss those two plates on his bar and still, not even a flinch. Two more plates - and now I'm sweating. I'm ok if my knees stay locked but if I tried to squat I would go down. You look at the champion next to me and he blinked this time, but that's all he did. But then the next time you load me up with weight, I feel my back muscles explode, my knees give way and down I go.

But this is not over. All eyes now shift to the champion as two more plates go on his bar and he's still standing there. You put two more plates on him and he's still standing there. You put two more plates on him and he's still standing there. You put all the plates that will fit on his bar and he is still standing there! You put the whole world on him and he is still standing there! We have never been tested to anywhere near that level and he is still standing there! Friends, *that* is what it means when it says Christ was tempted in everything you were tempted in. But take that exponentially and make it as large as it can be and He is still standing, without sin. He never breaks - not for one second.

That cannot be said of any other human being in the history of the human race. The Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Mother Theresa, Billy Graham – amazing men and women of God – all knew sin – every day of their lives. King David was one of the greatest and most loved Kings of Israel – a conqueror in battle and a man after God’s own heart. He gave us some of the most beautiful and worshipful Psalms ever written – yet he was a murderer and an adulterer. Mighty Samson goes to the gates of the city and rips them from their foundations and carries them on his back up a mountain and casts them down, but then he falls in sin under the weight of a woman’s words! But Jesus Christ grabs the gates of hell itself and throws *them* on His back, carries *them* up the mountain of all human history and casts them down forever and still He remains impeccable, spotless and without sin.

Brothers and sisters, when you choose to renew your mind in the Word of God; when you allow the Spirit of God to really connect you with the wonder and reality of just this one sentence, you will live in a constant state of marvel before Christ! If Christ does not marvel you today; if Christ does not mesmerize you; if Christ is just a number – maybe even number one among many, then *you* need a revelation from God today!

You need the Spirit of God to open your eyes and your heart to the One before Whom we gather in this service. He knew no sin. He knew no sin! Which makes the next part of this amazing verse all the more shocking and confronting. This champion of human beings, this one of a kind Man Who knew no sin, was made to be sin for you and for me!

Jesus had persevered His entire life and resisted everything the world and Satan himself had thrown at Him and He was still standing pure and strong until finally this day we call Good Friday arrived. This day when the spotless Jesus had the sin of the entire world placed upon Him by God the Father and *this time . . . this time* He went down. Not because He weakened morally and knew sin personally – not at all. He was actually crushed to death under the weight of all sin – past, present and future. It was not *His* sin - it was your sin and my sin and all sin. This was like a legal transaction between mankind, represented in Jesus of Nazareth, and the Holy God of all creation.

The wrath and holiness of God against all sin, was thrown down upon Jesus on that cross and the penalty, punishment and natural consequences of all sin was paid in full in that one amazing act. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf - and that prophecy spoken by Isaiah centuries before was fulfilled on earth as it was always fulfilled in heaven. “... *he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*” (Isaiah 53:4-5) So for what purpose was He Who knew no sin, made to be sin on our behalf? The rest of the verse tells us clearly:

2 Corinthians 5:21 *“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

That means that we have been declared righteous by God the Father, in Christ. Please stay with me here because this is the truth which will set you and all those you love free for eternity. On the cross of Jesus Christ, God the Father declared Jesus to be sin before all creation and God’s pure holiness crushed Jesus to death in judgment, once and for all time, once and for all sin, even though Jesus knew no sin personally! Then, and only then, could God the Father declare you and me to be righteous in Christ even though we *do* know sin and continue to sin!

So here is the best news you will ever hear and if you fully embrace what I am about to tell you, your life will never be the same again – God will make sure of that! The moment a person believes in Jesus Christ and accepts, by faith, the salvation He offers them, at that moment from the Throne of Heaven, that person hears the declaration of God for the first time affirming them to be right with Him forever **and** God treats that person as right with Him in every possible way.

That's what Paul is saying in Romans 5: *"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have (not will have, might have or should have but we already have) peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God is released in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."*

God justifies us in the death of Christ and declares us to be righteous before Him. That is why God can love you without destroying you! That is why His holiness can look upon you in your unholy state and not burn you to a crisp. That is why any of us are still here, because God made a way for us in Christ – before we were even born! That's why this day when we pause to remember the brutal murder of an innocent man is called GOOD Friday – not because the death of Jesus was good, but because what that death *accomplished* is profoundly good for us. We really should change the name of this special day to *Awesome Friday* - and maybe more people would come and join us to find out why it's so awesome!

Now the only day that can beat *Awesome Friday* is *Mind-blowing Sunday*, which you can call *Easter* if you like. On *that* day we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and it's His death *and* resurrection that secured our salvation, our freedom and our reconciled relationship to God and it all comes as a free gift. That free gift comes to us in love, with no strings attached, no requirements, no religious hoops we have to jump through – it is a wonderful, outrageous and dangerously free gift.

So you see friends your favour before God and your right standing with God is not in any way determined by your personal performance – and just as well – because if it was, then your performance would have to be absolute 100% perfection, because even the tiniest sin would destroy you in the presence of God. Your eternal relationship with God has been secured by God Himself. He wouldn't trust you with something so important to Him. He did it Himself, because only He *could* do it. And He did it in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel! *This* is the Truth! Believe it, receive it and watch it transform your entire life. *This* is why every man, woman and young person on this planet pays homage to this Christ every time they write the date. This is why all our schools, our hospitals, our judicial system, our governments all have their roots in the community of faith which this one Man birthed when He allowed Himself to be nailed to a tree.

This is why all the armies that have ever marched; all the navies that have ever sailed; all the parliaments that have ever sat; all the kings that ever reigned put together, have not affected mankind on earth as powerfully as this one solitary life, and the reason is right here:

2 Corinthians 5:21 *"God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

What is it that led you to connect with us here today? What is it that has brought many of you to Church for so many years? Is it Christ? Is it Christ? Is it Christ!? Or is it fear or guilt or obligation or a soothed conscience? Is it friends, fellowship, moral activities or just what you've always done? Brothers and sisters, let it be Christ and Christ alone that draws you here. Let it be Christ. Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and everything else will follow. Let it be Him Who knew no sin but became sin for you. Let Christ be the only reason you are here and the only reason you return here or anywhere else where the Word of God is honoured and preached. Let it be Christ . . . and never, ever forget, all this is possible because, *"he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."* (Isaiah 53:5)

Do I hear an 'amen!?'