

THE WORD OF FORGIVENESS

Luke 23:27-37

Good morning! How many of you enjoyed our food and fellowship last week? Great food, wasn't it? Right now, I'm already looking forward to the last Sunday of the month. That's in 3 weeks. Thank you to our ladies who organized this. You know who you are and people know who you are. Now, how many of you also enjoyed being transformed to Daniel Padilla or Taylor Swift? Berg was there last week and with his phone app, went around making people feel like they're celebrity for a moment. So, who enjoyed that? C'mon raise your hands. That includes me. My wife, too, and I know many of you. Why are not you raising your hands? You feel guilty or ashamed?

Because of that, we're going to start a new series this month entitled "The Seven Deadly Sins". The first I'm going to tackle is the sin of vanity. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity."

Ok, I'm just joking. The real title of this series is, "The Seven Greatest Words of Love". It is February, the month of love, and so what is more appropriate than talking about love, right? As you may have guessed, there are seven parts in this series. This should take us up to close to the end of March.

So, in this series, we're going to look at the cross in detail. You see, when Jesus was crucified on the cross, he made seven public statements. They're called – they're very famously called – the seven last words of Christ. They're not actually the last words of Christ because Jesus resurrected and then spent 40 days talking to people after that and we have the records of all of that. So he said a lot more after he came back from the dead. But these are called the seven last words of Christ...before he died. And every one of them explains a benefit to your life.

Most of the people in the world know that Jesus died on a cross. Fewer people know that he died for our sins. But even less know all of the benefits of what Jesus paid for on the cross.

If you call yourself a Christian, you of all people really ought to know what Jesus actually paid for on the cross besides simply paying for your sins. So, if I asked you to make a list of ten of the benefits that you get to experience in life and in eternity because Jesus died on the cross for you, could you give me instantly a list of ten? If you can't, you need to be here every weekend of this series. The Seven Greatest Words of Love.

We're going to begin with "The Word of Forgiveness". This is for all of us who committed the sin of vanity last week. Ok, that's a joke again. Maybe not.

Now, let me set this up. In Luke chapter 23 – and we're going to look at this Scripture this weekend and the implications of it – we have the story of Jesus right before he goes to the cross. This is like he's carrying the cross up the hill to be crucified. Please get your Bibles and turn to Luke 23:27-37. Follow along as I read this passage from the NIV.

Read Luke 23:27-37

The first word that Jesus gives from the cross is what I call the word of forgiveness. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Many of us have gone on a trip. If you're an immigrant, I'm sure you've gone on a trip on an airplane to come here. If you can't drive or you don't have a car, you may have gone on a trip on a train or a bus to visit New York, for example. If you're the adventurous type, you may have gone on a road trip in your car a few times a year. And if you want to enjoy your time with other women, you are going on a trip on a boat sometime in June.

But has anybody ever gone on a guilt trip? That's what we want to look at this weekend.

God says guilt is not something he wants you to carry in your life. Guilt creates all kinds of fears in our life. The fear that I'll be found out. The fear that somebody's going to reject me if they find out what I've done. The fear that somebody will retaliate for what I've done. The fear that God is going to judge me. Guilt creates enormous fear in your life. God does not want you to walk around feeling guilty because it creates all kinds of negative emotions and problems. You know, Jesus came to die to pay for your guilt.

What I want to do today is look at what we normally do with our guilt, what God wants us to do with our guilt and how to be free from our guilt. If you're carrying any guilt, there's no reason you should walk out of here after this service still carrying that guilt. This is the time to let it go and get it dealt with.

So, **what do we usually do with our guilt?** Three things. Write these down. Number one. The first thing we often do is bury it.

1. WE BURY IT

We try to bury our guilt. At least we try. Have you ever heard this statement: "You've got to bury your past?" You know what the problem is? It doesn't work. Why? Because it won't stay buried. It's like a zombie. It keeps coming back to life. It keeps coming back in your dreams, in your thoughts, in your memories. It can resurrect itself at the most inappropriate time. It's like that horror movie *Night of the Living Dead: Resurrection*. It comes back to haunt you.

You cannot bury your past. You can deal with it but you can't bury it.

In Psalm 32, David says this in verses 3 to 5. *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I*

acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin."

Everybody here has a favorite way of trying to bury the past. Some people try to do it by minimizing it: "It's no big deal. It wasn't that big a deal." If it wasn't why can't you forget it after all this time? Some people minimize.

Some people rationalize. They say things like, "A lot of other people have done this." Rationalize is to tell *rational lies* to yourself. Every time you rationalize you are telling rational lies to yourself. You're trying to convince yourself with your mind what's right. But in your heart you know it's wrong. It doesn't work.

So some people minimize, some people rationalize.

Some people compromise. What do you do so you don't feel guilty? Simple. Just lower your standards. Say it's not a sin. It doesn't bother me. It's not that bad at all.

Have you come across a fortune cookie that said, "Commit a sin twice and it won't feel like a sin." What kind of pervert wrote that one? Commit a sin twice and it won't feel like a sin. That's true. It's called a hardened conscience. You do something long enough you stop feeling bad about it. The 15th lie is easier than the first. It's still a lie, however. Some people keep lying and it doesn't bother them. They're used to it. They have so lowered their standard.

Proverb 28:13 says this: *"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper."* Take note of that. Put it on your mirror. Why? To remind you that you cannot bury your sin. It will eventually catch up with you. And talking about catching up, thanks to the internet everything you do now is permanent, global, and searchable. And it's never going away because it's on the internet.

So we bury it. That doesn't work. What else do we try to do?
A second way we try to deal with guilt...

2. WE BLAME OTHERS

We want to shift the blame to other people. This is a tactic, honestly, as old as creation. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned. Adam took it like a man. He blamed his wife. They both ate of the forbidden fruit. When God comes to Adam he says, “What did you do?” Adam did not readily admit it. He pointed to Eve. *“The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”* (Gen. 3:12) Notice he didn’t just blame Eve. He blamed God. “God, if you hadn’t created my wife...then I would have never sinned.” We sometimes do the same thing. As Proverbs 19:3 says, *“Some people ruin themselves by their own stupid actions and then blame the Lord.”*

So, we bury it, we blame, and the third thing we do.

3. WE BEAT OURSELVES UP.

This is a common thing too. A lot of people when they feel guilty, they beat themselves up. They subconsciously try to pay for their mistakes.

Think about this: Can a guilty conscience make you sick? Yes! One study I read said that over 50 percent of the people in the hospital could go home tomorrow if they knew how to get rid of either resentment or guilt. If they could just deal with those twin misery buddies, they could leave the hospital. Yes, guilt can make you sick.

A lot of times people are sick and they think, “Maybe I’m not eating the right thing.” You may not be. You may need to correct what you eat. But also you need to check out not just what you eat but what’s eating you. Because what’s eating you can make you fatigued. Can make you stressed out. Can make you have no energy. Can guilt cause depression? Sure. It’s a form of atonement. I’ve done wrong so I’ll just make myself depressed. Can guilt sabotage success? Absolutely. Listen to this: Many people have sabotaged their own success because they’ve thought, “I don’t really deserve this.”

In Psalm 38:4-6, David says, *“My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.”* That’s called depression. I’m sad all day long. My guilt overwhelmed me.

You know the problem with punishing yourself, and some of you have been doing this. You did something wrong a long time ago and you knew it was wrong but you’re still punishing yourself over it. You know the problem with punishing yourself? You don’t know when enough’s enough. You don’t know when to stop the punishment. So you just keep it on and on and on.

Some of you are still beating yourself up over stuff that happened years ago. Five years ago, ten years ago, as a child. And you’re still beating yourself up. That’s not smart. That’s not wise.

Those are the ways we typically deal with guilt – bury it, blame, and beat ourselves up. That’s not what God wants you to do. **What does Jesus want you to do with guilt?** He wants you to do three things. Take note.

Number one, the Bible is very clear, very specific about how to get off a guilt trip. The steps are simple but they’re not easy.

1. ADMIT IT.

That’s the first thing. I just have to admit it. I’ve got to get out of denial. I just own up to it. I say “I blew it. I did wrong.”

You know, sometimes when we run from guilt, we try to run from it by keeping busy and we keep ourselves so busy overworking. You can even do that with ministry. A lot of people who are actively involved in ministry are doing it for the wrong reason. They’re running from their guilt. That’s not a good reason to serve God. It’s not a reason to serve others. And they’re trying to atone for it in their background. They say, “I’m going to make up for it by being active in this ministry”.

Then, sometimes we try to deal with the guilt by moving quickly. Literally moving. Some people will move away. I blew it in a certain area so I'm going to move away from that area. I'm going to travel. You know the problem with that? Wherever you go you take yourself. So you could move to Tahiti and you're going to take your guilt with you. When you finally slow down and you put your head on the pillow at night and be quiet, all that guilt rushes in.

That doesn't work. I just need to admit it. Look at some verses from the Bible. Proverb 20:27, "*The Lord gave us mind and conscience; we cannot hide from ourselves.*" That's why guilt is so devastating in your life. You can hide it from others but you cannot hide it from yourself. So, you've got to start by just admitting it.

1 John 1:8 says, "*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*" We have to admit our sin. We have to admit our guilt. That's the first step to get off the guilt trip. Once you admit it you're ready for the second step. It's this:

2. ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY.

That means I'm not going to blame anybody else. They may be 99 percent at fault and I'm one percent at fault. All I'm going to deal with is my one percent right now. I'm not dealing with your problem, your sin, your hang up. I'm dealing with *me*. I accept responsibility. And again I don't rationalize it and say it happened so long ago. And I don't blame others and say it was mostly their fault. I don't minimize it. I don't make excuses.

One day King David had a moral failure in his life. And he looked out of his palace and he sees a beautiful, gorgeous nude woman bathing on her roof. When David saw her, as you know, it eventually led to adultery and murder. And she got pregnant with David's child and David had her husband murdered.

Then David writes out his moral inventory. It's called Psalm 51. It is David's moral inventory and confession of sin after his adultery with Bathsheba. In that he doesn't blame Bathsheba for one percent even. He takes it all on himself. In Psalm 51 verse 3 he says this: *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me."*

What is the best way to insure that you have accepted responsibility for the dumb things you've done in your life? What's the best way to do that? This is going to shock you. It's simple but it's not easy. The best way to accept responsibility is to tell one other person. *Oh no! You've got to be kidding me! My deepest, darkest, dirtiest secret? Yeah.*

You don't go tell a gossip. And you certainly don't Tweet about it. You find somebody who's going to be a friend, who's going to love you unconditionally. That's what a friend does. A friend walks in when everybody else walks out. A friend is somebody who can listen to your worst sin and will still love you. And everybody needs one person in their life like that. Admit your fault to another person.

In fact, God says this is an essential key to letting go of guilt.

Now, many of you have confessed your sins to God and you still feel guilty. Because you haven't done this step. You have confessed your sin to God over and over and over and you still feel guilty. But you've never told one other person. Here's what God says. James 5:16, *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."* Note the word "healed".

Let me explain this. If you want to be forgiven for the stuff you've done wrong all you need to do is to tell God. But if you want to be healed of the negative emotions you need to tell one other person. I'll say it again. If all you do is want to be forgiven you just need to tell God. But you'll still be haunted by your

own emotions. If you want to be set free you need to tell one other person. Tell one other person. The Bible says, “*confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*” **Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing.** Revealing your feeling is the beginning of healing.

You say I don’t want to do that. Then you want to carry the guilt the rest of your life. Fine. You can take it out on yourself. If you don’t talk it out you’re going to take it out on your body. And when you swallow your negative emotions your stomach keeps score.

People say, “Oh my aching back! Oh my aching neck! Oh my aching stomach.” Maybe it’s what’s eating you. God says admit your faults to each other so that you may be healed.

So I admit it. I accept responsibility. And there are only three steps to getting rid of guilt. Here’s the third one:

3. ASK FOR FORGIVENESS.

There are so many promises in the Bible about forgiveness if you’ll take these three steps. 1 John 1:9 is the most famous one. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”**

So I ask for forgiveness. There’s even a right way to ask for forgiveness. And there’s a wrong way. Let me tell you the wrong way to ask for forgiveness.

First, don’t beg. “Oh God, please, please, please, pretty please with sugar on it and a cherry on top. Oh God, please, please, please.” Like God is unwilling to forgive you. No. He’s more willing to forgive you than you are willing to admit it. You don’t have to bribe or bargain or beg God. You don’t bribe and say God, if you’ll forgive me then I’ll do this good work. You don’t bargain. God, if you’ll forgive me I’ll never do it again. God says, “Yeah, right! You’ll be back there on another day or so.”

Forgiveness does not change the future. It clears up the past. That's another episode we need to deal with later on in this series. But you don't beg. You don't need to. God wants to forgive you. You don't bargain – I'll never do it again. You don't bribe. God, I promise I'll tithe 20 percent.

No. Just ask. Romans 3:23-24 says this: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely (you don't have to beg, bargain or bribe God) by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”*

You say, but Rolly, you don't know what I've done. It doesn't matter what you've done. I don't need to know what you've done. I could tell you this: What matters is what Jesus has done for you. That's what the cross is all about. We said when we look at the cross – Jesus hangs on the cross and the first thing he says is, *“Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.”* So the first message of good news, the first word of love from the cross, is the word of forgiveness. And when you come to God humbly and honestly, admitting, accepting and asking, Jesus says Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing. He comes and his immediate response is forgiveness.

You may be saying, “I've done that, Rolly. I've asked God over and over and over to forgive me, but I don't feel forgiven.” Let me just say a couple of things. You don't have to ask over and over and over. When you ask over and over and over you're acting like God didn't hear you the first time. When you ask over and over and over you're saying I don't really believe you forgave me. That's a sin. I don't really believe you forgave me so I'm going to ask again. Because I haven't forgiven myself I'm going to ask again.

The problem isn't God. The problem is you haven't confessed it to another person and let it go. That's false guilt from Satan.

Let me explain how this works. Before I commit a sin, Satan minimizes it. “It's no big deal. Go ahead and do it. Everybody does it. It's no big deal. Go

ahead and do it.” That’s minimizing it. The moment I do it Satan changes strategies and he maximizes it. “That is so big you will never have the blessing of God in your life again.”

See how he works? It’s the exact opposite. Before you do it, it’s no big deal. After you do it, you stupid pervert! You nutty sinner. You wild evil wicked, mean, bad, nasty person! And he just maximizes it afterwards. If you keep asking over and over that’s a lack of faith. You don’t really believe God forgave you.

The reason you don’t feel forgiven is because you haven’t done all three steps. And you don’t really believe you’re forgiven.

So **what does Jesus do when we do it his way and ask his forgiveness for our sin?**

- **ONE, HE FORGIVES INSTANTLY.**

Instantly. You don’t have to suffer a little while first. He never makes you wait. He doesn’t say I’ll think about it. The moment you ask – zero delay.

- **NUMBER TWO, HE FORGIVES COMPLETELY.**

He forgives completely. He’s not just quick and merciful to forgive. When Jesus died for your sins which ones did he include on the cross? Every one of them. Even the ones that you haven’t committed yet have already been paid for on the cross. He died for all of them. When he said, Father, forgive them; they don’t know what they’re doing, it included everything you ever have and ever will do wrong.

- **NUMBER THREE, HE FORGIVES REPEATEDLY.**

God forgives repeatedly. Have you ever committed the same sin more than once? Yes. Can you ask for forgiveness again after you committed the same sin? Yes. God does not get bored with your confessions. It is God’s nature to be forgiving. Hebrews 7:25, **“he (Christ) always lives to intercede for them.”** Jesus is the go-between and God will never reject the request of his Son on our behalf.

- **NUMBER FOUR, HE FORGIVES FREELY.**

You don't earn it, you don't deserve it. It's a gift of God's grace. Because you are human forgiveness is your greatest need. And because Christ died for you, forgiveness is God's greatest gift.

So in closing, let me just say this: Have you been haunted by secret sin? You can be set free. All you need to do is to admit it, accept responsibility, and ask for forgiveness. And God is faithful. He will forgive you unconditionally. Because he loves you unconditionally.

Today, we're going to take communion. Let me say another word before we take communion together. God wants you to never forget what it cost Jesus to pay for your sins. God never wants you to forget what it cost his Son to pay for your sins. God never wants you to forget what Jesus did in order to forgive you. And that's why we take communion.

The Bible says communion or the Lord's Supper is only for people who've actually accepted God's forgiveness by committing their life and trust to Jesus Christ. If you've never settled this issue you're not ready to take communion. You're not ready to take communion until you have put your total trust in Jesus Christ. Otherwise it's a sham. It's a fake. It's phony. It means nothing to you. How can you take the symbols of God's forgiveness to you if you haven't put your trust in a Savior who paid for it? You can't.

The Bible says in Psalm 32:1 and 2, *"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit."*

God wants to give you happiness and God wants to give you relief from the guilt that you felt for the things you've done wrong in your life. Communion is a symbol of what I just taught you in this service. Don't beg, don't bargain, don't bribe God. Just believe. If you have not believed in Jesus Christ, you have not put your trust in him to be the Savior of the world, if you don't let Jesus pay for your sins you're going to have to pay for them. Somebody has to pay for your sins. Either you or Jesus. Somebody's got to pay for your sins. The Bible says, *"The wages of sin is death,"* and Jesus died on the cross for you. That's how much God loves you. That's God's grace. That's God's mercy.

Let me ask our ushers now to distribute the elements. You can open them as you get them.

Before we take communion, we're going to pray a prayer together. If you've never settled this issue I want you to do it right now. I want you to be free from guilt and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and as your Lord. You don't have to beat yourself up any more. You don't have to belittle yourself any more.

So I want us to pause right now and bow in prayer. Would you bow your head with me?

Father, I know that without a doubt there are people here listening and even listening online. Some of them are suffering under an immense load of guilt and shame and regret. For some people it's been eating away at them for years. Let this be the day of their release. Let this be the day of their relief. Let this be the day of their freedom that comes with your forgiveness. Now I want to invite you to pray this prayer if you've never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior in your life. I want you to say something like this. You can say it with your lips or just in your mind. Say this prayer, "Dear God, you know everything about me. You know everything that I'm ashamed of. You know my regrets, my sins. You know my mistakes. You know my habits. You know my actions and attitudes that I feel guilty over. Today, Jesus Christ, I again admit that I need your forgiveness. I agree with you that I've done wrong, that I have sinned. And many times I've done what I wanted to do rather than the right thing. But I not only admit it, I accept responsibility for it. And I'm not going to blame anybody else in my life. I'm not going to make excuses. I'm going to own up to what's wrong in me, in my life. I want to change. I want to go your way. I repent. I want to follow you and I want to trust you completely. Jesus Christ, thank you, thank you for what you did and what you said on the cross. Thank you for saying Father, forgive them. I believe that. I ask you to forgive me for even the things that I don't even know about. Take away all my guilt. I thank you for paying for my sins on the cross so I could be forgiven. And now in faith I do accept your gift of forgiveness and salvation. Thank you for forgiving me instantly and completely and yes, God, thank you that you forgive me repeatedly. And most of all I thank you that you forgive me freely. Please help me to feel forgiven. And to forgive myself and to forgive everybody else around me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

Shall we all now take the bread. It is the symbol of the body of the Lord Jesus which was crucified on the cross for our salvation. Let us eat.

Now let us drink from the cup which is the symbol of the blood of the Lord Jesus which was poured on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Let us drink.