

God Help Us

1. Warm-up Question: On Sunday Pastor Jeff told how Pastor Jason went to the Heart Attack Grill in Las Vegas even after Jeff had warned him not to. When Jason couldn't eat all his food, the waitress offered to paddle him – awkward – and the food made him feel sick afterward. Tell us about a time in your life when someone warned you not to do something, but you did it anyway and regretted it. ☹

2. On Sunday we began a new sermon series exploring the meaning of the cross. When you think about it, the cross is an odd symbol for our faith. Remember, in the first century, the cross was not some pretty gold thing you hung around your neck or some beautifully carved piece of wood hung on the wall. It was a means of government execution. The modern equivalent would be a syringe for lethal injection or an electric chair. It's not like the early Christians had no options. They could have chosen the fish as the ultimate symbol of our faith.
 - a. If you were a brand consultant to the early Christians, helping them to decide whether to use the fish or the cross as the symbol of our faith, which would you have recommended? What are the pros and cons of both?

 - b. Why do you think the cross emerged as the dominant symbol?

3. In this new sermon series, we'll look at the cross from four different angles, each taking us deeper in our understanding of our faith and how to live it. On Sunday we tackled the first meaning, which is found in one of Jesus' great parables. Read Luke 20:9-19, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Let's remind ourselves of the symbolism of this passage. Who/what does each of the following elements of the story represent?

The Vineyard = _____
The Vineyard Owner = _____
The Tenants = _____
The Slave/Messengers = _____
The Son = _____

 - b. What does this story tell us about why God put us here and what we're supposed to be doing with the gift of life?

 - c. What does this story tell us about the state of humanity and of planet earth? Are we doing what we're supposed to be doing? Is earth functioning as God wants? What's the fundamental problem?

 - d. The Pharisees, i.e., religious leaders, led the rebellion against the Son. What's the significance of that? What can we learn from that?

4. Jeff summarized the First Lesson of the Cross like this: The cross is the greatest and most outrageous example of a pattern of stubborn rebellion against the goodness of God that has repeated itself throughout history – and in each and every individual life. The cross conclusively demonstrates how broken the world is and how broken we are.
 - a. To remind us of the magnitude of the human potential for evil, Jeff told the story of the Tulsa Race Massacre. Sunday marked the 100th Anniversary of the Massacre, which resulted in the death of 300 Black Americans, left hundreds injured, more than 1,470 homes burned and looted, 8,000 homeless, and 6,000 in internment camps. Dynamite was even dropped from airplanes. For the benefit of anyone who didn't hear the sermon, have someone in your group tell what happened in Tulsa.
 - b. How could so many otherwise “decent” and religious White Tulsans have been suddenly mobilized to so viciously attack their fellow citizens who were Black? How do we explain this? What does it tell us about human nature and the nature of human government and institutions?
 - c. Tell us about a time in your own life when you've witnessed evil that boggles the mind. It doesn't have to be an historic event. It can be something you've witnessed in your personal life.

5. It would be comforting to think that evil people are fundamentally different from us. But the Bible begs to differ. Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one of us, to our own way.”
 - a. Do you believe that's true of you? Why or why not?
 - b. Read each quote below, then discuss it. What do you think the quote means? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Reinhold Niebuhr: “Most of the evil in this world does not come from evil people. It comes from people who consider themselves good.”

Alexander Solzhenitsyn: “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line dividing good and evil passes not through states, not between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart.”

Romans 7:15. “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . [S]in . . . dwells within me!”

Bono: His quote is longer and appears on p. 3.
 - c. Tell us about an area of your life where your relationship with Jesus has made you a little less broken and a little more beautiful. Also tell us about an area of your life where you still experience a lot of brokenness and need a little more beauty.

Luke 20:9-19

9 Jesus began to tell the people this parable: A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. ¹⁰When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. ¹²And he sent yet a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. ¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." ¹⁴But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, "This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours." ¹⁵So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

When they heard this, they said, "Heaven forbid!" ¹⁷But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then does this text mean: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"?"

¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.' ¹⁹When the scribes and chief priests realized that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people.

Quote from Bono, former lead singer of U-2

"Our nature is a hard thing to change; it takes time.... I have heard of people who have life-changing, miraculous turnarounds, people set free from addiction after a single prayer, relationships saved where both parties 'let go, and let God.' But it was not like that for me. [Instead of saying,] 'I was lost, I am found,' it is probably more accurate to say, 'I was really lost. I'm a little less so at the moment.' And then a little less and a little less again. That to me is the spiritual life. The slow reworking and rebooting the computer at regular intervals, reading the small print of the service manual."