

Title: To Save Sinners

Text: 1 Timothy 1.15

Theme: What did Christ do?

Series: What does it mean to be a follower of Christ? Pt.2

Prop. Stmt. Christ came to this world to save sinners.

Read Text:

Chuck Klosterman in ESPN magazine recently posed a very difficult question. What will baseball fans do when Barry Bonds breaks Babe Ruth's homerun record? "How do we reconcile a massive, momentous achievement that is neither wholly real nor socially good? Baseball is a game of numbers. There are volumes of statistics. But think about it, what is a statistic based on? A strikeout is 3 strikes. A walk is 4 balls. A stolen base is moving from one base to another. In other words, statistics have meaning because they are based upon actual, definable events. That is why it is so difficult to reconcile the career of Barry Bonds and his assault upon the homerun record. At age 37, when men in baseball are slowing down, this guy hit 24 more home runs than ever before. The allegations of his steroid use have never gone away and now it appears to me that they are being seriously investigated at a level far deeper than ever before. The obvious question is, "is it right or is it wrong?" If he has used performance boosting medication, then is it right to compare his records to Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron or any person in the record books?

Does it matter if a guy juices himself with steroids in order to play at a higher level? Is it any of your business what he does? After all, it is his body – isn't it? I am guessing that San Francisco Giant fans view Barry a bit more charitably than the rest of baseball fans. What is right? What is wrong? If Barry was a Detroit Tiger and helped us win a pennant, would we look at him differently? Is it wrong because it is on someone else's team, or is it wrong – no matter what? If you really embrace this idea that there is no such thing as absolute truth, that you have the right to make up your own rules about your life, you can see how this really begins to unravel. What is a homerun? These are not theoretical problems for a philosophy class. We do not live in a vacuum. We live in a real world with real problems. But what are those problems? What makes something a problem? (or as we say today – "he's got issues) Problem, issue, addiction, challenge, the words are often recycled in an attempt to stay away from one specific label. That label is sin. One of the reasons why the true God is not very popular, but oh so needed is because He labels things as they really are. This verse is clear evidence of that.

This verse (this truth), and therefore, this message has two parts. 1. What did Christ do – He came into the world. 2. He came for the purpose of saving sinners. The coming of Christ into the world is directly connected to his actions that brought about the saving of sinners. There are also a few of assumptions that this verse rests upon, notably that we are sinners, sinners have a serious problem, sinners need to be saved or rescued from their sin and its eternal consequences, if Christ did not come into the world, there would be no saving of sinners and sinners can only be saved through Christ.

Jerry Bridges gives a great illustration of this.

“The two young men pulled up alongside a car stopped at a traffic signal. On the prowl for someone to rape, they saw a lovely young woman in the car, just the kind of target they were looking for. Following the woman to an apartment complex, they seized her, took her to an empty schoolground, and both raped her. Realizing she could identify them if left alive, they decided to kill her in a most demeaning and horrible manner.

Back at the apartment complex some residents had heard the young woman scream as she was being abducted, noted the license number of the men’s car, and notified the police. Within a few hours the two men were apprehended and the murder knife, still covered with blood, was found in their car.

The entire community was deeply stirred by the heinous nature of such a crime, committed on a randomly chosen victim just about to graduate from the local university. Because of the brutality of the crime, and the unquestioned guilt of the young men, both of whom confessed, the district attorney asked for the death penalty.

The men of course were tried separately. [During the trial of the first man] The defense lawyer, while acknowledging the alleged actions of the first man to be tried, sought to prove that he was unduly influenced by the second man and thus not legally guilty. The jury was unconvinced and returned a verdict of guilty on all counts, [against the first man] but a three-judge panel that was convened to determine whether the man should receive the death penalty or life imprisonment failed to reach the unanimous decision required for death.

Now the community was outraged at the failure of the judicial panel to sentence the man to death. Regardless of what one may think of the death penalty, the people in that community felt that justice had been violated. They believed the man did not receive the penalty he deserved. They wanted justice, not mercy.

This is the way that most of us tend to view justice, especially in a case where a terrible crime has been committed. We want to see justice done. But what about the guilty party? He hopes for mercy or even a miscarriage of justice. He doesn’t want to see justice done. He wants as light a sentence as possible, or perhaps even to be declared not guilty.”

The people want justice! The criminal wants mercy! But if the penalty for the man’s crime is death, is there a way for both justice and mercy to happen? Not really. But let’s take it a step further. What if the second man in the story was found guilty of the crime and guilty of being the instigator and was sentenced to death, but the man’s father made a large contribution to the governor’s re-election campaign fund and the governor of the state issued a full and complete pardon to the man. And he walked out of jail – free! Is that legal? Sure! But, justice has just been destroyed and in fact is up for sale. When challenged by the media about his decision, the governor simply said, “We have people in prison for worse crimes than that. This man, had a problem, but he was not as bad as

he could have been. He only murdered one girl, when he could have murdered more. I think we need to send a message that we are a compassionate society and not a barbaric one.”

Would the people be incensed? I would like to think so. Would they seek to take matters in their own hands and move to have the governor impeached – I would hope so. But, before you sign the petition for a recall on the governor, chew on this for a minute. What I have just described to you is exactly how most people think God deals with sin. Do we go to church, participate in rituals, perform civic deeds, give money to the church and charitable causes so that God will in turn grant us a pardon? Is that how this works? Do we find out what religious steps to take to beat the system and therefore in essence, bribe God by contributing to His campaign fund? But wait a minute...He has to forgive sin – doesn't he? How? Isn't God a forgiving God? How? How can God forgive? How can God express his mercy without trampling His justice?

The answer is found in this verse. What did Christ do?

1. Christ Jesus came into the world

A. God, took on Human flesh (Christ Jesus)

During the Civil War a man could pay for another man to go and fight in his place in the army. If he paid enough money, his obligation would be fulfilled. His honor would not be intact, but his obligation would be satisfied. We needed someone to fight a battle that we could not fight but that had to be fought. We needed someone to live a life that had to be lived, but that we could not live. We needed someone to die a death that had to be given, but that we could not do. We needed an absolutely, perfect, righteous substitute to take our place. Romans 5 says that sin came into the world by means of the human race, so the human race had to pay the penalty of sin. But, we could not pay that penalty because we had no resources to pay. Christ became part of the human race, so that his life and death could be applied to humans. He took on human flesh in order...

B. To Live in our place.

The life that Christ lived was a life of perfect obedience. He showed us what it was like to live a life to the fullest in the sense that he not only perfectly obeyed in actions, he perfectly obeyed in desire. He delighted to do the will of God. His life was a continual source of pleasure to His Father. He thrilled the heart of the Father with everything that He said and did. God had established a perfect standard, called His holy law. Christ lived up to it. He kept it, both in spirit and in truth. Every act and thought of righteousness was done by the infinite Son of God. This was done so that when He went to the cross, He would offer His life as a perfect substitute in my place. His life was perfect so that He could die in our place.

C. To Die in our place.

The only way Christ could die was for Him to be viewed as having been a sinner. But, Christ was not a sinner – how could he die when the wages of sin is death? So, Christ became credited with our sin. My sin, your sin was placed on his account. He was treated by the Father as if He had committed all of your sins. This holy, perfect, righteous Son of God, became a despised, rejected and vile offering of sin in our place. His death was a violent death. His death was the occasion of a major event. Because He was perfectly righteous, he offered up to the Father, this perfectly righteous life as the full and completely payment for you. In order for the justice of God to be satisfied, so that God could be merciful to us, sin had to be punished. God could not be merciful to us, unless His justice was appeased. And it was! When Christ died on the cross, he became the recipient of the wrath of God that was being righteously expressed against our sin. Only Christ could take it all because only Christ was infinite.

One day as I was considering this, I wrote out this prayer to reflect this truth. “God, you would have been perfectly just in sending me to hell. But, you can’t now! Your justice will not permit that any longer because your wrath against my sin was worn out, exhausted by the death of Christ.”

The death of Christ on the cross was so perfect, so complete, so infinite, so full that it completely wore out and exhausted the wrath of God against our sin. There is nothing left to be done in order to earn or purchase forgiveness. God resents those religious systems that put people in bondage to rules and rituals thinking that by doing these things they earn forgiveness. What do we have to bribe God? It is foolishness and eternally destructive to believe that my religious activities or moral life can earn my forgiveness. My hope, is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.

Imagine that there is an organization called the Millionaires Club. It is appealing, popular, and full of many useful business contacts. But, the only way you can be a member of the Millionaires Club is, of course, you are able to prove that your net worth exceeds a million dollars. Herein lies the problem. Not only do you not have a million dollars, but after a 2nd and 3rd mortgage on your home, you owe more on it, than what it is worth. Your cars are leased, you have no savings account. You raided your IRA years ago for a cruise, and your credit cards are maxed out. You have no net worth. In fact, you are in debt. There is no way that you can be considered eligible for the Millionaires Club, it might as well be the Trillionaires Club! Do you see what is happening here? Instead of wanting to be in the millionaires club, I want to be in the eternal life club. But in order to be in that club, I need perfect righteousness, but not only do I not have perfect righteousness, I have an overwhelming amount of sin. The debt of my sin is an awful problem, but my complete lack of a God-satisfying righteousness is even worse. I need a Savior who can pay the penalty of my sin, and satisfy the justice of God so that I can be forgiven, and I need a Savior who can provide a perfect righteousness so that I can get credited with it. Only Christ can do that, and only Christ did that. That is why Christ came into this world – to save sinners. And that is why, even though you may be a big sinner, Jesus is an even bigger Savior.

2. **Christ Jesus saves sinners.**

Carl Henry was probably the finest theologian of the past 50 years. He was also one of the most humble. D.A. Carson, asked Dr. Henry one day, how he had remained so humble these many years. Dr. Henry simply replied, “How can anyone be arrogant when he stands beside the cross?”¹

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

If Christ came to save sinners, do you see what this means? It means that only sinners can be saved. As Jesus said, only the sick need a doctor. That is why, only the humble can come to Christ. Only the humble person recognizes that he has a true need.

A. **Only the humble may come.**

Christ Jesus saves sinners. In Matthew 9, some of the high-fluting religious leaders confronted some of the disciples of Christ and asked him – “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus said to them, “Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Jesus was quoting the OT scriptures to these men who supposedly had learned them and was teaching them that God does not help those who think they can help themselves. God’s mercy is poured out on those who admit that they are flat out of righteousness.

There are those who think they have some righteousness and therefore, they are deserving of the benefits of God – those are the “righteous” who are not righteous. The “righteous” who are not really righteous fall into two categories. First you have those who think they are righteous because their sins are not as socially deplorable as others. In other words, I may have some problems, but I am not nearly as bad as that person. In the second group you have people who do all sorts of deplorable things but they say – “Hey, at least I am not a hypocrite!” “I know I have a problem, but I am not nearly as bad as that person who pretends that he doesn’t.” Both groups, those who pretend they are better than others, and those who pretend they are better than others because they don’t pretend to be better than others are in their own way holding on to their own righteousness as the reason why God should go easy on them and forgive them. Being humble is not being proud of the fact that you are not proud. Being humble is realizing that you have no righteousness that counts in God’s economy and you have no hope of being righteous by yourself. You need a Savior! Therefore when you, humble in heart and poor in spirit cry out to God to be merciful and gracious to you and give you His righteousness because you do not have any. Jesus says – Yes! That’s my boy – that’s my girl! And like the Father who ran down the road to meet his prodigal son who was returning from the far country, God and His mercy comes running to us to embrace us and reclaim us.

¹ Taken from Humility: True Greatness by C.J. Mahaney pp.67-68; Multnomah Publishers 2005.

There is no other way for you to be forgiven and rescued from your sin. That is why you have to put the entire weight of your life and soul upon Christ and Christ alone. Only complete faith counts.

B. Only complete faith counts.

I was speaking at a Bible college in India several years ago. One day while I was riding in a taxi, I noticed that the owner/driver had a cross for Christianity, a Crescent/star for Islam, and a Hindu symbol all on his dashboard. He said that he wanted to make sure that he was covered, no matter which one was right.

On the surface, it may look as if religions are like a Chinese buffet, you can have a little bit of everything, or a lot of one thing, but all that matters is that you get something. Genuine Christianity is not simply another option in the midst of many choices. There is only one way that your sins can be forgiven, only one way to be declared righteous in the eyes of God. There is only one way to God. Christ will not settle for anything less than your complete trust. That is not being cruel, that is being true. There is no other way.

I mentioned last week that when the hijacked jets were flown into the towers of the World Trade Center, that hundreds of people were trapped in the floors above the points of impact. Many of them called 911 and were told to stay put, help was on the way. In the North Tower, every elevator, and stairway was destroyed. There was no way that help could get to them. The access door to the roof was padlocked, and no one could break through the doors, to be rescued by helicopter. There was no hope. In the South Tower, there was one stairway that was still intact, that if found provided a way out for those who were trapped. Unfortunately, that information was never communicated to the 911 operators, who kept telling the people who were trapped to stay put, because help was on the way. The brave firemen and policemen wanted to help and many of them died as they attempted to do so.

Friends, this life is like the South Tower. There are many religions and many philosophies that may even have some noble intentions, but they cannot stop the complete destruction of a world system and its people who are guilty of sin. But there is a way out. It is only one way. That stairway is Christ. Come to him, by faith alone, accept and trust what He has done for you.