

God looked at the world He had made and His heart was grieved by what He saw. He saw a vast brokenness that manifested itself in pain and sickness, violence and oppression, rebellion and unbelief. The world that God loved, the people He had created, were languishing in this brokenness.

But God was—He is—no ivory-tower-God, sequestered away in glory, too prim or too proper to stoop, to help, to rescue. He is faithful, filled with love, a Passionate Healer and Restorer. And there came a time, when God spoke two words that changed the course of history: “*It’s time.*” Time for what?

Laurence Housman writes,

“Light looked down and beheld Darkness.
‘[There] I will go,’ said Light.
Peace looked down and beheld War.
‘[There] I will go,’ said Peace.
Love looked down and beheld Hatred.
‘[There] I will go,’ said Love.
So came Light and shone.
So came Peace and gave rest.
So came Love and brought life.
[God became] flesh and dwelt among us.”¹

This is the message of Christmas: God became one of us, He took on our flesh and blood, He was born as a baby. “The One from on high

was born down below...Born in a stable, wriggling in straw, [He was] fully committed to life in the raw...To a world in need He did not send another, God the Son became God our Brother.”²

Jesus lived as we live, with the same complexities, temptations, wounds, longings, and disappointments. Jesus didn’t float through life, five feet off the ground—He walked the same dusty streets, stubbing His toes on all the same rocks. Jesus was fully committed to life in the raw, life as it is, life as we know it.

If we are honest, whether we look inward or outward, we are forced to admit that things aren’t the way we want them to be. Brokenness abounds—broken bodies, broken emotions, broken dreams, desires, and families, even broken economic systems and nations. “*It shouldn’t be this way,*” we tell ourselves. We find ourselves hoping for something better.

And this longing for something better is more than wishful thinking. This longing is a whisper that points to Jesus, a hope reminds us that we were made for more than brokenness, disappointment, and pain. In Jesus we find the promise of rescue and restoration—the promise of wholeness. In Jesus, God came near with a face to behold and a hand to embrace. He became one of us. He came to be with us. Jesus is living proof that God is for us.

¹ As quoted by Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According To John (Revised)*, 91.

² Anti-Santy Rant (vimeo): <https://vimeo.com/54075943>

There is much about Christmas that is easy to market: new birth, hope, peace, and the giving of gifts. Easter is much harder to market in our shopping malls; not surprisingly, violent death doesn't hold the same appeal to consumers.

One author writes, "When I picture the cross, always, always, I see arms. The outstretched arms of Jesus." Think about for a moment...if Jesus had been stoned, His arms would have been raised to protect His face. If Jesus had been beheaded, His arms would have been tied behind His back. "Instead," Andrea writes, "Jesus' arms were stretched taut, leaving bare his heart. Even when he could no longer physically hold them out, His arms were held in place by the nails."³

In the Bible, one of the titles applied to Jesus is "*Emmanuel*," which means "*God with us*." Not "God far off," "God uncaring," or "God out of touch." He understands the reality of rejection, shame, disappointment, abandonment, violence, and fear. The death He died, He died for us. The wounds He bore, He bore for us. He took our wounds of rejection, shame, and disappointment, our sickness, our pain, and our sin upon Himself. And then He died.

So why is it that 2000 years later, people are still talking about Jesus of Nazareth? Because of the resurrection. Three days after Jesus was buried, two of His followers went to His tomb, expecting to find His body. Instead, they encountered an angelic messenger who said, "*He is risen! He is not here!*" Death tried in vain to hold Jesus, but it could not.

If Christmas is the celebration of Jesus' birth, then Easter is the celebration of His death. It sounds strange to put it that way, doesn't it? Celebrating death of any kind is strange, unless of course one celebrates the death of a cruel enemy, and therein lies a key to the Easter story. Unjustly accused, tried, and condemned, Jesus was crucified as an enemy of Rome. Many have suggested that in the death of Jesus, evil had the last word. The Bible sees things very differently.

In fact, the Apostle John records the last three words Jesus uttered before He died—He said, "*It is finished*."⁴ The question is, *what did He finish?* God's rescue plan had been accomplished, the power of sin had been broken, death was defeated, victory assured, forgiveness bought, pardon offered, wholeness promised, and eternity secured. *It is finished!* St. Theodore of Studios once wrote,

*How splendid the cross of Christ!
It brings life, not death;
Light, not darkness; Paradise, not its loss.
It is the wood on which,
The Lord, like a great warrior,
Was wounded in hands and feet and side,
But healed thereby our wounds
A tree had destroyed us;
A tree now brought us life.*

³ Andrea Midgett, as quoted by Stephen Seamands, *Wounds That Heal: Bringing Your Hurts To The Cross*, 113.

⁴ John 19:30.

Listen to the words of Isaiah the prophet, *“the fact is, it was our pains he carried— our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole.*

Through his bruises we get healed. We’re all like sheep who’ve wandered off and gotten lost. We’ve all done our own thing, gone our own way. And God has piled all our sins, everything we’ve done wrong, on him, on him.

He was beaten, he was tortured, but he didn’t say a word. Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered, and like a sheep being sheared, he took it all in silence...Even though he’d never hurt a soul or said one word that wasn’t true.

Still, it’s what God had in mind all along...The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin so that he’d see life come from it—life, life, and more life. He took on his own shoulders the sin of the many, he took up the cause of all the black sheep.”⁵

Jesus died and three days later He rose from the dead. When Jesus emerged from the grave, He wasn’t pale, weak, and sickly—He didn’t need a team of doctors to nurse Him back to health. Jesus was raised with a new resurrection body—where once there had been open wounds, there were now only scars. Jesus was wounded no

more. Luke and John highlight this fact in their resurrection accounts. When Jesus appeared to the disciples He said to them, *“Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see”*.⁶

Why is this significant? Because when we come to Jesus, we come to One who can do more than sympathize with us in our frailty—we come to the One who has passed through death into life, through woundedness into wholeness. And, so, Jesus is more than the source of compassionate sympathy, He is also the source of healing and wholeness.

The last few weeks we have been talking about Jesus in light of what Isaiah wrote—Jesus’ wounds are “wounds that heal.” We’ve talked about the wounds of rejection, shame, and disappointment, and each week we have invited you to bring wounds to Him.

Bring to Jesus the rejection you’ve carried for years—give Him all the painful “no’s,” the “you’re not good enough’s,” and the “I don’t love you’s”. Give Jesus your memories of abandonment, betrayal, and abuse—let Him bear these wounds for you.

Bring to Jesus all the shame that you’ve carried—give to Him the shameful words that you’ve spoken, the deeds you’ve done that you cannot wish away. Bring to Jesus all of the shameful things that have been said to you, and the things done against you. You were not meant to carry this shame—let Jesus bear these wounds for you.

⁵ Isaiah 53:4-12, *The Message*.

⁶ Luke 24:38-39.

Bring to Jesus the disappointments that have shattered your heart, crushed your spirit, or embittered your soul. Maybe you feel entitled to more. Maybe you thought you had a deal—you would do your best to be faithful, and God would make sure your life stayed free from pain or loss. You can even bring your disappointment with God to God—He’s loving enough to come alongside and heal these wounds.

Jesus’ body was once full of wounds, but now only scars remain—He invites us to enter into healing and wholeness. Do you want to be healed? Do you want to experience wholeness? Come to Jesus. He has broken the power of sin. He has defeated sickness and death.

In Jesus there is pardon for our sin, for the wrongs we have done against God and others. In Jesus there is healing from the wrongs done against us. The rejection you have experienced at the hands of others can be healed by Jesus—your wounds of rejection can become scars that no longer afflict you. The shame you have experienced, or caused, can be healed by Jesus—shame need not bind you to the past, in the present, or in the future. The disappointments you have experienced, this too can be healed by Jesus—He can lead you into contentment and peace. Complete healing and wholeness is a journey that takes time, but it begins the moment we bring our wounds to Jesus.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you would say to me, “Mark, I don’t even know where to begin; I don’t have a relationship with God but I want one—where do I start?”

John 1:12-13 says, “*But to all who believed [Jesus] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth...but [with] a birth that comes from God.*”

To accept Jesus is to accept His assessment of us: we owe to God a debt we cannot pay, we have turned away from Him in thought, word, and deed, our relationship with God is broken beyond our own ability to repair. To accept Jesus is to entrust ourselves to His leadership—we surrender control of our life to Him, we choose to follow His thoughts and ways.

To believe in Jesus is to believe what He believed about Himself. He was both fully human and fully divine—God in the flesh. The death He died, He died for us, in our place, that we might have life. To believe in Jesus is to believe that our sin was put to death with Him, and that the forgiveness He offers, cleanses us and restores us to God. To believe in Jesus is to believe that He is living proof that God is with us and for us.

To a world in need He did not send another, God the Son became God our Brother—those who believe and accept Jesus are ushered into God’s family. Our hope is not that if we live a good enough life we **might** be reconciled to God, but that if we throw the full weight of our belief on what God has done for us in Jesus, **we will be saved.**

Turn to Him today.