

Wake up and smell the coffee!

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[0 : 00] Yesterday we were at Seton Castle and the elders and deacons of the church were there and we had a day of really learning about discipleship, learning about what it means to follow Jesus.

And for those who are visitors or new to the church, part of the reason for doing that is because our purpose statement as a church is that as followers of Jesus, we direct our eyes around three objectives.

See, I know this because it's on the back wall. We seek to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus does. That's what we seek to do.

Be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus does. And we're in the second year of unpacking that in terms of what it means as a congregation now that we've moved to this venue and as we are seeking to grow and reach out into the community.

I want to be very clear when people come into the life of the church what the, if you like, the ideal is for followers of Jesus. It's what he calls us to follow him, but he calls us not simply to follow rules and regulations but to learn from him and become like him.

[1 : 20] He models lifestyle for us, and it is the requirement of us as followers of Jesus to model that lifestyle to others, and that's what the leadership were doing yesterday.

We then hope in October time to have an overnight and all day, so an overnight Friday, not an overnight, but a night meeting on the Friday, and then a whole day on the Saturday to unpack that for you as well.

So we'll tell you more about that later. And that connects with what I'm doing today because what I'm doing today is preacher's choice. So we're not in a series, we're soon to go into a series, but we have a little bit of a space, so I felt very much led to speak on this topic.

I've used the Americanism, not expecting any American visitors, but there we go. We have some from Mississippi, which is great. Of course, we have somebody from Alabama too, don't we?

But yeah, wake up and smell the coffee. It's an expression that is an Americanism. More about that in a moment, but it's about reality.

[2 : 29] A little girl in Sunday school was asked by her Sunday school teacher, what is a lie? And she said, a lie is a sin and a very present help in time of trouble.

That compromise with sin, we're all familiar with. We can say, yes, something is right or something is wrong until we have to do it. And then we can find an excuse for why it's justifiable.

What is sin is a question that's going to occupy part of our time today. And already you'll think, oh, it's going to be a really negative sermon. But I hope it won't be. I hope you'll see why it won't be. But part of the wake up and smell the coffee, part of the meaning of that idiom, is the call to face reality. Face reality for what it is.

If you're interested in these things, it was first used in America in the 1940s in the Chicago Sun Times. So it's been around in the American culture for quite some time.

[3 : 40] It was popularized by Ann Landers, who used it as part of her advice column. So here's a wake up and smell the coffee moment. Next slide, please.

Oh, actually, I better read the scripture. But go to the next slide and we'll do that. Next slide, please. And the next one. Next one. You just need to be on your toes.

Here's a wake up and smell the coffee moment. Some of you will know this. Life is short. Death is sure. Sin the cause.

Christ the cure. And if you don't know that, it's really important that you wake up and grasp that reality. Life is short.

Death is sure. Sin the cause. Christ the cure. So we're going to read a scripture and then we'll come back to that thought.

[4 : 41] It's on the screen for you. If you flick back, 1 John chapter 1 verse 5 to chapter 2 verse 2. This is the message we have heard from him and declared to you.

God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourself, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word has no place in our lives.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

[5 : 53] He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his holy word.

Back to that slide, please. That one there, yeah. On the 30th of November 2020, 2020, sorry, a man who I don't know called Richard Rice, but a blogger wrote a very good article which was detailing the death of a neighbor from COVID just after the COVID outbreak hit the United States.

And this is what he wrote. A neighbor of more than 25 years died of COVID-19 complications. In early April, we were worshipping at home on Sunday morning as a fire truck and ambulance arrived across the street.

Gary was rushed into the hospital by first responders wearing hazmat suits. He was put on a ventilator and given 10 to 14 days to live. He soon fell into a coma and 10 days later died.

He got the virus after a visit from another neighbor who tested positive but showed no signs of the illness. Do you know the great difference between Gary and yourself?

[7 : 13] Gary knew when he was going to die, but you don't. As fearful and sometimes as crazy as COVID-19 has made people world over behave, we must remember that another virus has been among us much longer.

It is a virus without a fancy name or government recognition. In some people, it is more noticeable. Many seem asymptomatic, but everyone born to human parents carries it.

There is no vaccine to prevent it and no social distancing to control its spread. It is 100% deadly. But there is a cure, a costly cure, but freely given to all who will receive it.

Life is short. Death is sure. Sin the cause. Christ the cure. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus is God's cure for sin.

Through faith in Jesus alone to save. God both forgives and forgets your sin against him. Jesus does much more than cover your sins like a band-aid.

[8 : 21] He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It's a wonderful, wonderful statement. And of course, at the time of COVID, you remember, it was really scary when they were turning up with hazmat suits and you were whisked off to hospital, sometimes never to come out, never to see your loved ones again, never to be able to be with them, not able to be with them even when they were dying.

We're grateful that the world has moved on, but remember those scary times because it's a wake up and smell the coffee moment. When you're that close to the reality of death when it's all around you.

Some of us would have followed the news late last night with the Iranian attack on Israel with a degree of bated breath. I'm sure our colleagues from the early warning center were busy.

We just don't know, do we? When our time will come, how vulnerable we are, both as individuals and the world is always on the brink of our oblivion.

Death is sure. It is sure. And it really doesn't matter how long you've lived because I bet if you're anything like me and you've reached a certain age, you'll be thinking, where did that go?

[9 : 42] Where did that go? And it gets speedier as you get older, which is kind of weird. Do you remember when you were young you used to get bored because the days seemed to drag on? You just wish they would drag on when you get older, don't you?

But they just don't. Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Next slide, please. Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

But remember the apple, or at least we don't know if it was an apple, just a really good-looking fruit that Adam and Eve were tempted with. You see, sin is a deadly virus, but it is very attractive.

And it finds an ally in our hearts that says, I really want that. I really enjoy that. It looks good. It will make me feel good. I need it.

And if I get it, I'll be happy. I'll be fulfilled. I will reach my life potential. Become like God, knowing good and evil.

[10 : 46] But actually, that's not what sin is. Sin is deception, John says. The person who is sinning is self-deceived.

They think that sin is making them happy, but in reality, it is like a wild animal seeking to devour you and take control.

What is sin? Well, the old Westminster Shorter Catechism said, sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. It's a good explanation.

Because we tend to think of sin as something we do wrong. We break the commandments. We commit adultery. We murder. Whatever might be the case. Or even something less serious.

In our mind like that, we tell lies. Or we covet. All sins. God doesn't distinguish. But that's not just what sin is. Sin is any want of conformity unto.

[11 : 47] That means, sin is not doing the things that God says you ought to do because they're good to do. Sin is ignoring the man who is in need on the street corner. Sin is turning a blind eye to the injustices that people suffer.

and saying, well, I'm okay, so it doesn't matter. Sin is not reaching out to the person in need. Sin is neglecting to do the good that we ought to do.

So, you know, even if I pride myself on not having done anything scandalous, I know I've neglected to do things that I ought to have done when I was convicted by the Holy Spirit to do them.

And the Bible says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We've all kind of missed the mark. And the point of that is not to say, you know, that God's got a checklist and he's kind of, oh, yep, John Winder, yep, he's dreadful, I give up on him.

It's not like that. But it is, nonetheless, a recognition that when you miss the mark, you fail to be the person God intends you to be.

[12 : 57] Because God is our creator, just like any creator, gives really good instructions about how to use this washing machine so that it doesn't break down as easy as it would if you were the wrong sort of stuff into it.

He provides us with the maker's instructions about how to live our lives well. But if we choose to ignore the instructions, we're going to break down quite quickly. We miss the mark because we fail to live the way God intends us to live for our good and for our happiness and well-being.

We listen to the devil who tells us that God didn't really intend it to be that way and he is doing it deliberately to keep you from being the kind of person you want to be. So you've got to find your identity, be true to yourself, whatever that means, and ignore God's instructions.

You see, as I said to the folk yesterday, one of the groups I was in, you know, that kind of language of find your identity, be true to yourself, et cetera, it seems really modern and hip. It's really very old. It's as old as the Garden of Eden. That's very much the devil's language. Be yourself. Ignore God. Live your life without restraint and you'll be happy.

[14 : 13] Well, it's not going too well, is it? So sin is a real problem. And when we think about sin as a real problem, we have to kind of ask ourselves, okay, what is to be done with it?

What is to be done with it? So next slide, please. Sin is the cause. So when we think about sin, we can think about it in different ways.

We often think about it in our type of church forensically. We see it as a problem to be removed.

The forensic aspect is the law court emphasis in the New Testament.

So the law court emphasis is, you know, we have sinned and broken the law. We stand before God, the judge, and he announces that we are sinners and we need forgiven.

He's got the evidence we're guilty as charged. Jesus dies on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He pays the transaction. There you go. There's my blood. There's the transaction paid.

[15 : 22] They are not guilty. Acquitted. Justified. And we talk about justified just as if I would never sinned. Okay. And that's true.

But that's not all there is. That's not all there is. Okay. So let's see the next slide. Sin. Oh, you can't really see that, but there you go.

Eye test time. Sin leads to guilt. So when God justifies us, we're declared not guilty. That's the forensic bit. Innocent is charged. Sin, however, leads to shame.

But through the forgiveness of Christ, we are accepted in the family of God. We're not shut out. The prodigal son story. The young man who comes home felt shame, but was welcomed lovingly into the father's house.

Sin leads to fear and dread. But forgiveness and acceptance by God brings confidence and peace. Sin leaves us lost. But forgiveness and reconciliation by God means we are bound and restored.

[16:26] Sin leaves us in despair. But forgiveness brings us hope. And this is the one I want to emphasize. Sin leads to sickness and defilement, but forgiveness to healing and wholeness.

Let me give you some scriptures. Next slide, please. Just to focus on this point. This one from Isaiah 53, verse 5. 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. Now, Isaiah doesn't want us to think that that means we'll not die.

Just as Jesus, when he said, I am the resurrection and the life, didn't want us to take from that that we would not die physically because he says, even if you die, yet you will live.

But what he wants us to see is that the atonement, the shedding of the blood of Christ has healed us, cleansed us eternally from the consequences of our sin.

[17:38] And because of that healing, because of that cleansing, we are healed eternally.

Remember, Jesus in Mark 2, verse 17 says, it is not the healthy who need a doctor but those who are sick, who are ill.

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Sin is making you ill, he says. Sin has polluted you, it's diseased you, you have its virus.

I have come as a doctor to cleanse you of it. And then 1 John 1, verse 9, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us, clean us up from all unrighteousness.

There is a cleansing power in the blood of Jesus, a healing power in the blood of Jesus. Now, John is very interested in his epistle.

I know Martin's going to speak on this next week. It's funny how we're doing the same sort of thing, isn't it? John is a very interesting letter. John says some quite startling things. Let's see the next slide.

[18:52] I think I put it on the slide. Maybe I haven't. Never mind, I'll read it to you. In 1 John 3, in verse 4 to 9, John says this, everyone who sins breaks the law.

In fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins and in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.

No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. Now, I want to ask you just to stop and think about that. No one who knows him keeps on sinning.

now if that doesn't make you nervous I don't know what will so what does John mean at first sight it seems to mean if you keep sinning you're not a Christian that's what it seems to mean but it can't mean that because in 1 John chapter 1 he's already told us that if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father this is chapter 2 actually verse 1 Jesus Christ the righteous one who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only ours but for the whole world so he's not saying that a Christian can't sin but he is saying that a Christian will not want to continue in sin he will not want to live that way and you need more time than this to unpack this but you take Paul's example in Romans 7 Paul in Romans 7 is talking about his sin the bad things he does but he says quite interestingly the evil that I do

I do not want to do the good that I want to do I sometimes I cannot do it and then he says what a wretched man I am who will deliver me from this body of death he's aware that there are as it were two sides to his nature we were talking about this yesterday there's the old self the old man and the new man the old self is in Adam the new man is in Christ and he's saying the old man that is still very much part of who I am it raises its ugly head sometimes and it's proud and arrogant and lustful and boastful and it does these things that it ought not to do and in my head I think I don't like that old man I don't want that old man to have control and we wrestle against it we pray oh God help me I don't want to be this way God forgive me I don't want to sin like this I don't like to hurt you and we're aware of that struggle are we not but then there's another voice the new man who's saying you don't want to be this way you don't want to bring dishonor to Jesus you don't want to shame

your Christian profession oh God help me to be holy and the new man is speaking and that is a struggle that goes on in every Christian and John because he's very fond of contrast he talks about light and darkness in his letter he talks about truth and lies he talks about the world and he talks about the flesh and he talks about the devil and he talks about God and he talks about love and hate he loves contrast he's effectively saying there are two types of people only two in this world the type of person who lives entirely for the flesh he has the pride of life in mind he has the lust of the eyes the lust of the flesh his whole desire is caught up in this world that's all he wants and he lives this way he doesn't care about sin he's quite happy to live in it as long as he doesn't harm him he's doing harm he doesn't really care about the harm to others but as long as he doesn't harm him or disadvantage him he can live that way but the point is the Christian can never live that way if he's really a Christian because the truth is in him and what does the truth do?

[22 : 48] it sets you free Jesus we noticed yesterday in John 15 Jesus says you are already clean through the word I have spoken to you he releases us from the guilt and the power of sin to live a life of righteousness two ways to live because sin has cleansed you it has changed you it has set you free it has a medicinal value be grateful be happy that when you sin you have an advocate with the Father you have an advocate in the Holy Spirit who prompts you and convicts you to say it's not the way for you that's not the way to please your Heavenly Father that's not the way you should live it's very important that we get this

I sometimes hear people say well you know Christians aren't perfect they're just forgiven well that's true but it's a really low bar it's like please excuse me for us doing some abominable things but I am forgiven you no no no no that is not the aspiration of the Bible the aspiration of the Bible is be holy as the Lord your God is holy John is saying I write this to you so that you will not sin he didn't say I write this to you so I can give you an excuse you know he has a little card that gets you gets you a free pass to do what you like but it's alright because you can pray and ask for forgiveness no no no Jesus has higher demands than that he cleanses us from the guilt and power of sin so that we can be free to live for righteousness have higher ambitions we want to become like Jesus and he believed it was possible for us to say no to sin and yes to righteousness and we should seek to be the best we can be for Jesus remember Genesis 4-7

Cain and Abel do you remember when Cain killed his brother Abel and then he was kind of in a misery well you should be if you murdered your brother and God said where's your brother and he says I don't know it's not my responsibility am I my brother's keeper well yes you are actually if we're going to have a debate about it but that's not the issue at the moment your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground and then God said something really fascinating sin is crouching at your door its desire is to have you but you must master it it's like a wild animal like a lion ready to pounce that's the way to think about sin it is ever seeking to control but by the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit we don't need to be controlled by sin we are not under the domination of sin because the son has set us free

God's call upon us says Paul is to say no to sin but yes to righteousness for the grace of God which bring us salvation has appeared unto all men teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts denying it saying no to it you may live godly lives in this present age that's in Titus chapter 2 see it's a very different picture now the power of Jesus to set us free from the guilt and the power of sin by his cleansing blood two ways to live two ways to live and this is a message not just for non-Christians this is a message for all of us that don't think well I know this you know but I became a Christian years ago so I'm forgiven the question is not are you forgiven the question is are you living in the power of God to overcome the power of sin in your life or are you giving in to it pacifying it telling yourself well you'll be alright because the blood of Jesus cleanses you he cleanses you to change you imagine going to the doctor and say doctor I've got a really bad pain and he said I'll give you some painkillers but it's not going to make you feel any better well what's the point of them then or imagine going to the doctor and say doctor I've got a really bad pain I'm going to give you pain because you have to take them every day for 14 days and you'll be fine and then you stick them in the drawer and you never take them what would be the point of that but isn't that kind of like the way some of us treat the blood of Jesus it's there I'm aware of it but it has no efficacious power in your life now I'm not saying you can be made perfect I'm just saying you can be better we can be better we can live in faith in the power of the blood that enables us to overcome this is the victory that overcomes the world even our faith there's something dynamic and impactful about this we are growing transforming more and more into the image of Jesus this is what we used to refer to as

sanctification okay

[28 : 40] I need to move on quite quickly remember the problem with sin is that sin enslaves it enslaves you remember when the devil came to Adam and Eve he said to Eve that fruit looks really good don't you think he was the world's first influencer if you read them Satan had an Instagram page or a YouTube channel even before technology was there doesn't that look good well it does yeah but we're not to touch it why not God said it would be bad for us God he gets in the way all the time doesn't he you just can't live up to your true potential you know if you just kind of sit there in the garden all day eating the rest of the fruit when you could have that and that would make you really wise and that would enable you to live to your full potential and that would allow you to be free and so she ate it and then something came over her she gave it to her husband and he ate it and something came over him and she looked at him and he looked at her and they both felt really uncomfortable discovering for the first time that they were naked and ashamed actually not discovering they were naked but discovering something called shame and then what did they do well they hid because God was coming and they couldn't bear to look at

God now because they knew they had done wrong and they were away and then God said where are you Adam where are you and he knew exactly but they had to bring them out you see they had to own this sin they had to confess it so they came out and they told him all about it and they discovered something really interesting about sin and its deception that which was supposed to make them free and enable them to live up to their potential bound them in shame and guilt it took over them like the wild animal crouching at the door it desired to have them and it got them and look at the consequences ever since on this sad sinful sin polluted world that's what sin does I'll just have a little drink it won't do me any harm said the alcoholic I'll just take that drug just for a high this once said the drug addict I'll just play around this once said the sex addict get my point sin crouches at your door it wants to take control and it always will and there is only one medicine that can break its power the blood of Jesus

Christ so then next slide please sin is the cause of the problem oh by the way Bruno Mars theology you're amazing just the way you are look it up on YouTube it's a good song he's singing it to a woman she's amazing just the way she is well I'm sure she is and there's lots to admire about us men and women but we're still sinners and when he marries her he'll realize not because no no no don't get me wrong because he will realize that she will tell him that he's a sinner so sin is the cause but Christ is the cure next slide please Christ is the cure it's not moving on that slide is the stuff this is a wake up and smell the coffee moment sin and snails next slide please

I want this to be really practical at this point you need to understand when you wake up and smell the coffee that this world lies under the sway of the evil one 1 John 5 19 and the evil one infects every part of it all of that time you spend on social media leaves you open to a narrative about life that is directly opposed to the narrative that God wants to speak to you that's not the same as saying it's all bad because you can get an awful lot of good scripture and sermons and everything else on social media nothing wrong with the social media but Satan will use the social media to peddle the messages about you and how wonderful you are and amazing and everything else alright or he will tell you not to worry about sin or anything else all of that kind of stuff there is a battle for the mind that goes on and the issue is whose voice do you listen to whose truth are you going to believe we all believe in someone it's just a question of who we all believe in something it's just a question of what

God says to you you are wonderful I love you you are amazing because I created you but I love you too much to lie to you sin has caused you a great deal of strife and it is a deadly virus that is going to kill you for eternity unless you repent of it and turn to me for forgiveness God will tell you that truth and it will wound and hurt he's not going to smooth you with lies and say well you're amazing you just need to try harder find your true potential make the changes get rid of the toxic people in your life now you imagine I think I might have a picture of this next slide please carry on you just ignore my yeah there you go that's a good picture is that you sometimes you know you wake up in the morning and you think oh goodness not another day everything's wrong in my life I hate my job the dog needs feeding or the cat needs putting out

[34 : 59] I've got to get out it's a cold morning I've got to make tea and make breakfast and then I'm off to work I'm going home the kids are going to be noisy the husband's going to be annoying the wife's going to be a problem I just need to change my life need to change I'm so unhappy so maybe you'll decide to change get rid of the dog kick out the husband send the kids off to camp

somewhere try your own stuff for a while live your life enjoy it you're free but you don't feel much better so you go to the doctor he does a few tests you've got anemia that's why you've been lacking energy and vitality and you've been unwell he gives you a dose of medication you begin to feel better you think I made so many mistakes my husband wasn't that bad

I love the dog really I miss the kids how many of us are driven by our feelings we think if only these things would change we'd be better but the discontent that we have inside is not because of others it's from inside it's because inside there's a lostness that needs to be found there's a wound that needs healing there's a desire that only Jesus can fill no amount of money in all of the world no amount of possessions in all of the world can satisfy your deepest need only Jesus can sin is the cause of the problem Christ is the cure next slide please so we're going to wrap up you can ignore that but not this we're going to take communion soon you see sin can be good news because if anyone sins we have a solution

Jesus sin can be good news because sin allows us to identify and own the things that make us unhappy that stop us from living up to the standards that God wants us to live by and crucially provides a solution to our greatest need and so sin brings us to Jesus it is our schoolmaster it leads us to Christ if anyone sins we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous one there is an answer it's great isn't it imagine having an incurable disease nothing can be done and loads and loads of people have died and all of a sudden there's an announcement there's a cure for that you'd cure with the door to get it wouldn't you but here is the great cure for all of your unhappiness and all of your sin it is Jesus and it is available today dearly beloved brethren that's good 1662 language the scripture move of us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and weaknesses we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts we have left undone those things which we ought not to have done and we have done those things which we ought not to have done and there is no health in us but thou oh lord have mercy upon us miserable offenders spare thou them oh god who confess their faults restore thou them that are penitent according to thy promises declared unto mankind in christ jesus our lord and grant oh most merciful father for his sake that we may hereafter live a godly righteous and sober life to the glory of god amen if you go to a a! at some point alcoholics anonymous you have to stand up and you have to say hi i'm john winter and i'm an alcoholic don't report that by the way that's not true my father my father was john winter he could say that my brother poor winter could say that too by the grace of god i can't say that but only by the grace of god hi i'm john winter i'm a sinner but by the grace of god the blood of jesus god's son has set me free he's cleansed me from all my sin so that the power of sin may not reign in me but the grace of god transforms me to become more and more like jesus and that is available to you today amen