

It's All About Jesus

"It's all about Jesus." Every Christian congregation will say it. Every individual Christian will say it (about themselves). They even believe it. ***But is it true?*** Given the year we've had to live through, many a Christian is (rightly) lamenting that we haven't been about Jesus. It ***needs*** to be about Jesus, but it hasn't been about Jesus. Not even close, and that's the problem. Well... look in the mirror of your own life. Is it true? ***Is your life really all about Jesus? Are your words, your thoughts, and your deeds really all about Jesus?***

Look to this cross. Consider your sins, not just the "really big ones" that you can't handle yourself. (*How often we confuse "feeling guilty" with actually being guilty. Just because you may not feel guilty doesn't mean you're not guilty.*) Consider your sins... **ALL OF THEM**, even the "little ones" that the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh deem "not a big deal." What is the wage for sin? Any and all sin? Now see yourself how God sees you, through the lens of His holy Word and Ten Commandments. What? Is it somehow different in your particular case? Everybody is doing it, right? It's the 21st century! Divorce? Adultery? It's not good, but it's not that big of deal, right? *"I still love Jesus. He knows my heart."* Yeah... that should scare you. He knows your heart. Maybe your sin isn't that big of deal to you. Then again, maybe your sin is a result of a very special circumstance. It's an extenuating circumstance, so that means that in this special case what would normally be a sin is no longer a sin... or at least, it's not that big of deal. *"At least I'm not like really bad sinners! There are plenty of people who do way worse things than I do. Besides, we're in uncharted territory here! It's unprecedented!"* Ahh yes... *"Fear, love, and trust in God... except in certain circumstances."* Yeah... see ALL those sins—from Commandment 1 to Commandment 10 and everything in between—through the lens of Christ's cross. God died for those sins. Look to this cross. It ***IS*** all about Jesus. It's all about what God does for you, and He does for you precisely because you don't do and can't do for yourself.

The Gospel account of the three temptations exemplify this. The devil doesn't come at Jesus with crazy, off-the-wall temptations that nobody else has ever had to endure. He comes at Jesus with the most ***fundamental*** desires—***hunger, pride, arrogance, control, and greed***. Jesus does for us what we don't do and can't do for ourselves. He doesn't give in to temptation. He trusts in His God and Father perfectly, ***above all things... even His own desires***. He does all this, **not** as mere ***example*** for us to follow (as if we even could), because if we could do these things, then Jesus didn't need to die. No! He does all these things ***for*** us—in our stead and place—because we can't (and don't) do them for ourselves. He does all these things for us so that we don't die; so that we may have the gift of eternal life. *"God so loved the world...."* It's all about Jesus. It's all about what God does for us.

Look to the Old Testament lesson. Just look at how things have been for us children of Adam since that first terrible day when humanity plunged itself into the death sentence of sin. After their fall into sin and death, our first parents don't console each other with the grace of God. No! The best plan they can come up with is to hastily weave together some leaves and then flee and hide from God. They don't speak Gospel. They don't even *listen* to the Word of God when tempted. They tuned out. Instead, they *looked* and they *saw* that the forbidden fruit was *pleasing to their eye*, so they took and ate. Faith comes through hearing, right? They trusted what they saw (or wanted to see) rather than what God had already told them. Already then, it wasn't about God. ***It was about themselves; what they wanted.*** Be honest: Is it any really different in your case?

Now consider what your God and Lord does for these undeserving sinners. He comes to them, not in wrath, ***but in gentleness and mercy***, in the cool evening breeze. The fact that He comes to them at all is amazing! He doesn't wait for them to come crawling back to Him. He comes to them. He comes to them and bespeaks His life-giving, life-saving Gospel. He comes to them and provides the only clothing that will adequately cover His beloved. Fig leaves won't cut it. ***They still don't.*** Man's own designs and coverings and excuses and justifications will ***never*** adequately cover over the shame and guilt of their sin. God is the very first One to shed the blood of another living being, and He does it all for them. He covers them with the hide of the animal that He Himself put to death... for them.

We don't know what that first animal was. Scripture never tells us. Our faithful forefathers (dating back well into the Old Testament) have long-believed that God shed the blood of a ***lamb*** for His beloved children. It certainly makes sense. God covered His beloved children over in the hide of the lamb. I know that the Christological "Passover Lamb of God" imagery isn't lost on you here. But even in a more crass sense (which tends to be my wheelhouse), God uses a lamb. He doesn't work the way I would. If it were up to me, those disobedient sinners would be sentenced to wear pelts of porcupine quills. And even then, that would still require the bloodshed of an innocent porcupine. If it were up to me, I'd replace those fig leaves with poison ivy. I'd weave together some skivvies made out of thistles and thorns. Thank God it's not up to me or any sinful child of Adam for that matter. Error only begets error. Sin only begets more sin. We'd only make it worse; never better.

Folks: Look to this cross. God doesn't work the way we do (and thank God He doesn't!) God shed the blood of this holy, perfect sacrificial Lamb for you, for me, and for all of us children of Adam. Here is where God Himself took on a crown of thorns, woven together to simply mock Him and make Him suffer all the more. He bore those wretched thorns for us in our place. Jesus endured all this suffering for us and our sin. The innocent One became the curse in our place. He accomplished (and completed) all that we could never do, no matter how good our

intentions; no matter how hard we tried. ***“It is finished!”*** By the shedding of this blood God gives us what we do not and can never earn or merit: His mercy, His grace, His peace, His gift of eternal life.

Now I want you to look to the font/rail. Our God and Lord ***still*** comes to us, not in fiery wrath, but in the lowly, humble “breezes” that are His means of grace. The water and blood that flowed forth from the holy Lamb’s side ***still*** flows to us. Look to this font. Here is where our thorn-encircled Lamb of God brings His victory over sin, death, and the devil to us. Here is where He brings His free and unmerited gifts of grace, mercy, and peace to us. He comes to us and covers us over with the all-availing righteousness of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. ***Only His righteousness will do. Nothing else works.*** Look to this rail. Here is where God Himself comes to us, nourishing us with the one and only source of eternal life—His own body and blood. Here at this meager font and rail is the gate/door to the new Eden; to heavenly paradise. ***“I am the gate. I am the door. If anyone enters by/through Me, he will be saved....”*** What was once closed off by God with fiery sword (the Tree of Life) is now open to all because this Lamb of God willingly endured the fiery sword of His Father’s wrath for us. This [*the crucifix*] blood-stained tree of the knowledge of good and evil (in God’s eyes) has become the tree of life, and this life-giving tree is open to all. ***“God so loved the world....”*** His blood has forever quenched the fire of His Father’s just and righteous wrath. ***“No one comes to the Father except through Me.”***

My friends: Here is your salvation. Here is your peace and assurance. Here is God’s mercy and grace, lifted up and exalted for you and for all the world to see...***and to turn and flee to and hold fast to*** in the joy of repentant thanksgiving. This is what Adam and Eve didn’t know in those terrifying moments as God drew near to them. **Here is the fulfillment of that first Gospel promise.** Here is God drawing near to you, right here and right now. By God’s grace, through faith, we do know what all this means, not just for us, but for all children borne of Adam.

You know...when you understand all this (which is the case only through faith; faith comes through hearing) how can you ***not*** want to flee here? When you understand all that God Himself gave up for you; when you understand how God didn’t flee from you and your sin (or quarantine from you or stay away from you because the weather was inclement), but instead willingly came down into this fallen veil of tears in order to take on your flesh and crush the head of the serpent, sin, and death for you, ***how can you not want to flee here?*** Knowing all that Christ has done and still does for you, how can you not want to flee from your sin, and instead flee in repentant faith and thanksgiving into the outstretched arms of Him who died for that sin?

Dear friends: It really is all about Jesus—Immanuel. Here is God with you and for you. May this peace and joy be your peace and joy, now and into all eternity. **AMEN**