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September 8, 2013

Sermon Summary

A Dozen Things God Did With Your Sin (and three things he doesn't and never will do) Micah 7:18-19

All of us at some time or another, to varying degrees, struggle with the fear and the apprehension that perhaps God has not dealt fully and finally with our sin. We read in Scripture about the “joy” of our salvation and we’ve tasted it, a bit here and a bit there. But there is often this unshakable sense of condemnation that simply won’t go away. It haunts us and taunts us and wants us to believe that there’s simply no way God could look with love and approval on us. I’ve heard people say things like:

“What if I push God into a corner with my repeated failures as a Christian? Won’t he eventually get so fed up with me that he’ll lash out in anger and cast me aside forever?”

Or,

“No one can possibly be that generous and gracious and forgiving, not even God. There has to be a limit to his patience too, doesn’t there?”

Or,

“I keep hearing this voice in my head that says forgiveness is for everyone else, but not me. After all, God’s no idiot. He has to know the thoughts that enter my head and the words that come out of my mouth and the doubts and anger and frustration that I face every day.”

Let me tell you why we think this way. Let me tell you why you aren’t living in the fullness of the joy and peace and satisfaction in your relationship with God that you so desperately desire. It comes down to one thing and one thing only: you and I have failed to believe what God himself says he has done with our sins. What consumes us is what **we** have done by sinning. What ought to consume us is grateful meditation on what **God** has done with our sinning.

So that’s what we’re going to do today. We’re going to look at what God himself says he has done with our sin, as well as what he doesn’t and never will do.

Before we begin, one thing must be kept in mind. Everything I’m about to say about what God has done with your sin applies only to those who have repented and have run to the cross of Christ and have vested all their hope and faith and confidence in who Jesus Christ is and what he died and rose again from the grave to accomplish. If you do not know Christ as your Savior, I hope and pray what you hear today will persuade you that your only hope is in him. My aim, therefore, is to comfort and encourage Christians and to convict and convince non-Christians. So let’s begin.

A Dozen Things God Did With Your Sin

(1) He laid your sin upon his Son. “All we like sheep have gone astray,” said Isaiah the prophet; “we have turned – every one – to his own way; and *the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:6). The first and most important thing God has done with your sin is to lay it upon his Son, Jesus Christ. Everything else that God has done with our sin is the fruit of this one incredibly gracious and glorious act of God. Jesus voluntarily offered himself to be your substitute, to die in your place on the cross, to suffer the judgment you deserved. The Father in turn reckoned Jesus to be guilty of your sins and thus liable to the punishment you deserved. He accounted or imputed Jesus as guilty, even though he was innocent.

This is what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21 – “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Divine justice and its expression in divine wrath against sin, to use Paul’s words, call for the reckoning or “counting” of our trespasses “against” us (2 Cor. 5:19). So how is it that, instead, I am forgiven the guilt of these wicked deeds? The answer of the apostle, in v. 21, is that God “made him [Jesus] to be sin” on our behalf. Don’t ever think that the love of God means that the wrath of God was ignored. Because God is just and righteous, there must be a reckoning or “counting” of trespasses. But because God is loving and gracious, the “counting” or “imputing” and the punishment it entailed fell on Christ.

This “counting” or “reckoning” of our sins against him is what he means in v. 21 when he speaks of Jesus being “made to be sin” on our behalf. Paul is talking about the liability to suffer the penal consequences of the law. ***Our guilt, incurred because of our trespasses, has been imputed to him so that we, through faith in his sufferings on our behalf, might have his righteousness imputed to us!***

That’s the first and most foundational thing God has done with your sin: he has laid it on his Son, your substitute, your Savior Jesus Christ.

(2) ***He forgave your sin.*** There are dozens of biblical texts that say the same thing, but listen to how David put it in Psalm 32:1a – “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven.” Again in Psalm 32:5 – “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

What does it mean for God to “forgive” our sin? It simply means that he promises never to hold our sin against us in order to justify our rejection or judgment. In other words, when forgiveness has occurred ***there no longer exists any legal or moral grounds on the basis of which God might condemn you or me.*** The punishment that sin requires is no longer a threat because it has been laid upon someone else, namely, our substitute Jesus Christ.

But to be forgiven also means that God promises never to bring up our sin or to remind us of it or to use it in any way to manipulate us or threaten us or to justify some action he may be taking in relationship with us.

In other words, to have our sins forgiven means that ***they simply no longer register or appear on God’s radar! They no longer factor in any relevant or meaningful way into the relationship we have with him.*** When we are praying, God isn’t thinking to himself, “Well, this woman has really screwed up badly in the past. Her sins are so many it clouds my mind. I’m not sure I’m going to listen to her prayers, much less answer them, in light of how many times she’s sinned in the past.” No! ***If forgiven, our sins simply no longer exist in the mind of God to shape or determine or govern how he feels about us or what he does or does not do for us in response to our prayers.***

A synonym of “forgive” is to “pardon,” as when God is said to “abundantly pardon” our transgressions (Isaiah 55:7).

The word “pardon” points us once again to the fact that God has declared that we are now and forevermore free from the condemning power of sin. We no longer need fear the punishment that comes with sin. We need no longer or ever again suffer the consequences of our transgressions, because Christ has suffered them in our place.

When the President issues a pardon to a condemned criminal, he or she is immediately released from prison with the absolute assurance and guarantee that they will never endure another day of judgment or condemnation. Their name is cleared. Their reputation is restored. Their standing in the sight of the court is now as one who is innocent. And such we are with God!

(3) ***He cleansed your sin.*** All through Scripture sin is portrayed as dark and ugly and dirty. It soils and spoils everything. It is like a deep, dark, seemingly indelible stain on our souls. It discolors and distorts everything. Yet God appeals to us in Isaiah 1:18 with these wonderful words: “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord; though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

When David finally came to grips with his adultery with Bathsheba and his complicity in the murder of her husband Uriah, he cried out to God: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” (Psalm 51:2). And again in v. 7, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

Never forget that this wasn’t simply for David some 3,000 years ago. This is the promise of God to each believer today. It is for you, now and forevermore, if only you will lay hold of Christ by faith.

So, do you “feel” dirty? Does your heart ache with the stain of sin? Does guilt darken your emotions and paralyze you in your relationship with God? It need not! For God has “cleansed” your sin!

So, God first laid our sin on Christ; secondly, he then forgave our sin; and thirdly, he cleansed our sin, making us pure and acceptable in his sight.

(4) He covered your sin. In Psalm 85:2 we read about how God not only “forgave” the sins of his people but how he “covered all their sin” (see also Psalm 32:1).

Why do you “cover” something? It may be to keep it warm or to protect it. But in the case of our sins, God covers them in order to *hide them from view*, so that no one may see them, whether it be God, you, or other people. Your sins no longer exist out in the open for all to see. They have been forever covered over by God through the blood of Jesus Christ and they are never again to be visible or accessible or available for anyone to use them to condemn or judge.

(5) He cast your sin behind his back. Hezekiah put it this way:

“Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back” (Isa. 38:17).

The imagery is vivid. It is as if God takes all our sin in hand and then throws it behind him, never to see it again, never to be influenced by it again, never again to take it into consideration when he deals with us or hears our prayers. He doesn’t cast it behind our backs but behind his. David said his sin was always “before him” (Ps. 51), but when he confessed and repented God put it behind his back.

God has taken your sin and placed it out of sight behind his back. All he sees now when he sees you is the blessed righteousness of his own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Such is the love of forgiveness.

(6) He removed your sin as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

The Hubble Telescope has given us breathtaking pictures of a galaxy some 13 billion light years from earth. Yes, 13 *billion* light years! Remember, a light year is 6,000,000,000,000 (six trillion) miles. That would put this galaxy at 78,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles from earth! In case you were wondering, we count from million, to billion, to trillion, to quadrillion, to quintillion, to sextillion. So, this galaxy is 78 sextillion miles from earth.

If you traveled 500 mph non-stop, literally sixty-minutes of every hour, twenty-four hours in every day, seven days in every week, fifty-two weeks in every year, with not a moment’s pause or delay, it would take you 20,000,000,000,000,000 years (that’s 20 quadrillion years) to get there! And that would only get you to the farthest point that our best telescopes have yet been able to detect. If the universe is infinite, as I believe it is, this would be the *mere fringe* of what lies beyond.

My point, the point of the psalmist, is that *the magnitude of such distance is a pathetically small comparison to the likelihood that you will ever be dealt with according to your sins or repaid for your iniquities!* If you were ever inclined to pursue your transgressions so that you might place yourself beneath their condemning power, 78,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles is an infinitesimally small fraction of the distance you must travel to find them!

(7) He passed over your sin. We now come to the 7th, 8th, and 9th things that God did with our sin, all of which are found in Micah 7:18-19.

“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and *passing over transgression* for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18-19).

To “pass over” is to pay no heed; it is to ignore; it is to act as if whatever is passed over is no longer present. But this doesn’t mean God ignores or pretends that our sin never existed. The reason God passes over our sin is because he has laid it on Christ. He did not “pass over” Jesus when he hung on the cross. He lingered in wrath as the Son of God was exposed to judgment that we deserved. That is why now God always and forevermore will “pass over” our transgressions.

(8) He trampled your sin underfoot.

“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; **he will tread our iniquities underfoot**. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18-19).

To “trample” or “tread” underfoot something is to exert your authority over it. It is to put on display the victory you have achieved over whoever or whatever your enemy may be. For God to tread underfoot all our sins means that he has defeated it. Its power over you is done away. Its authority to rule your life is undone. God has conquered the threat sin poses. He has taken steps to remove its condemning power. It no longer has the capacity to steal your joy or rob your value or determine your eternal destiny. And the way in which God goes about making this point and driving it home is by asking you to envision in your mind your sin on the ground, in the dirt, beneath God’s feet as it were, as he treads upon it, stomping it into oblivion.

(9) He cast your sin into the sea.

“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. **You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea**” (Micah 7:18-19).

The prophet Micah here draws upon Israel’s history to make his point. Nothing weighed more joyfully on the minds of God’s people than the story of how he delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt and then conquered Pharaoh and his armies by drowning them in the Red Sea. Listen carefully to the language of Exodus 15:4-5 that describes this incredible event:

“Pharaoh’s chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone” (Exod. 15:4-5).

There is simply no escaping the fact that Micah is appealing to this victory of God over the enemies of his people to portray what God does in defeating and subduing and forever setting us free from the guilt and punishment of our sin:

How much more graphic must God be before you enter into the joy of his forgiving love? All vestige of condemning guilt is gone. Again, “just as God said He *put* our sins behind His back, so here He says He will *hurl* them into the depths of the sea. They will not ‘fall overboard’; God will hurl them into the depths. He wants them to be lost forever, because He has fully dealt with them in His Son, Jesus Christ” (Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, 40).

Like you, I watched with amazement as the latest underwater technology scoured for remains of the Titanic, recovering from the bottom of the sea what everyone thought lost forever. No! No! It won’t happen with your sins! The submarine has not been made that can submerge that deep. The equipment has not been found, and never will be, that can retrieve the slightest vestige of your transgressions. God forbids it. Such is the quality of his forgiving love.

(10) He blotted out your sin.

“I, I am he who **blots out** your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

“I have **blotted out** your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you” (Isaiah 44:22).

“Hide your face from my sins, and **blot out** all my iniquities” (Psalm 51:9).

Have you ever fooled around with an “Etch-a-Sketch” (I just dated myself!)? It’s that toy with what looks like a television screen and two knobs that enable you to sketch whatever fits your fancy. I never was much good at it. I’m not an artist by any stretch of the imagination. The “Etch-a-Sketch” was made for people like me. If you don’t like what you’ve “drawn” and especially don’t want to be embarrassed should anyone else see it, you simply tip the screen and your work of “art” vanishes!

It’s a crude and simple illustration, but that is a lot like what God does with your sin when he grants forgiveness. Through the course of our earthly existence we sketch an ugly scenario of sin and rebellion and ingratitude and jealousy and lust. There it is, vividly imprinted on the screen of our souls. But when we confess our sin, as David did, God’s loving and gracious hand tips the toy and the slate is wiped clean! No matter how often we return to deface our lives with ugly pictures of hatred and anger and pride and envy, God is faithful to tip the screen. All it takes is confession. All it takes is the blood of Christ.

(11) He turned his face away from your sin. We know this to be true because this is one of the requests made by David when he repented for his transgression:

“**Hide your face** from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities” (Psalm 51:9).

Don’t look any longer on my failures! Let not your eyes gaze on my wickedness! Perhaps the best way to understand this is to consider its *opposite*. When people do not repent and trust God’s provision for forgiveness, he *doesn’t* turn his face away; in fact, he looks intently and angrily at their sin:

“For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes” (Jeremiah 16:17).

But for those whose trust is in Christ, God forever and finally has turned away his face from all our transgressions. He cannot see them. He does not catch so much as a passing glance at our sin.

(12) He has forgotten your sin. He quite simply refuses to remember it.

“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and **I will not remember your sins**” (Isaiah 43:25).

“For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and **I will remember their sins no more**” (Heb. 8:12; cf. 10:1).

But how can this be true if God is omniscient, if he truly knows all things? Would not my sins be among the things that he simply cannot not know? Technically speaking, yes, God knows everything. But he is as one who *chooses* not to remember. He puts your sin out of mind.

How utterly different from us is God! When people violate our rights or transgress us or defraud us or lie to us or break a promise we make it clear to them: “I’ll *never* forget this. I’ll never let *you* forget this. I’ll remember this to my dying day. I’ll make sure I keep this in the forefront of my mind forever and I’ll throw it in your face every chance I get.”

God, on the other hand, promises never to remember. He will not brood over our sin. He will not reflect upon it, think about it, contemplate it, analyze it, or ever again bring it up to himself, to you, or to others.

Those are the twelve things God has done with your sin.

And Three Things He Doesn't and Never Will Do With Our Sin

Above and beyond the dozen things God did with your sin there are three things he **doesn't** and never will do.

(1) He doesn't and never will use it to determine how he will "deal" with us (Ps. 103:10a)

(2) He doesn't and never will appeal to our sin in order to repay us (Ps. 103:10b)

(3) He doesn't and never will count it or impute it against us (Ps. 32:2)

"He does not *deal* with us according to our sins, nor *repay* us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10).

"Blessed is the man against whom the LORD *counts no iniquity*, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Psalm 32:2).

We will combine them into one.

Consider for a moment how we "deal" with others. We keep fresh in our minds their injustices toward us. We nurture the memory of their faults and failings. We never let them forget what they did and we often make sure others are mindful of it as well. We seek every opportunity, often secretly and surreptitiously, to make them pay for their transgressions. We hold it in our hearts and over their heads and persuade ourselves that it's only fair that they be treated this way.

Now consider again this description of God in his "dealings" with us: "He does **NOT** deal with us according to our sins" (v. 10a). Our sins do not constitute the rule or standard or plumb line according to which God makes his decisions on how to treat us. He does not recall or bring to the fore or publicly announce our history of hatred and lust and blasphemy and greed and pride before he formulates his plan for our life or before responding to something we've just said or done.

Better still is the second statement in v. 10, namely, that God does **NOT** "repay us according to our iniquities" (v. 10b). It's certainly not because our iniquities do not deserve repayment. They are deep and many and heinous and are deserving of the most severe, indeed, eternal judgment. But those who "fear him" (v. 11b) need never fear that he will exact payment or demand suffering or insist, according to the rigors of his law and unyielding holiness, that we endure the penal consequences of violating his will and ways.

Now, here's the question: *Why* does God *not* deal with us according to our sins (Ps. 103:10)? *Why* does he *not* repay us according to our iniquities? *Why* does he not count or reckon our sins against us? In other words, on what grounds does he take such magnanimous and marvelous action? Does he simply wave the wand of mercy and dismiss our guilt? Does he merely shrug off our rebellion and unbelief and hostility as if they were nothing and of no consequence? Does he ignore the dictates of his holiness when he forgives us? Does he pretend that justice matters little or that love trumps righteousness?

Clearly the answer is no! The reason why God does not deal with *us* according to our sins is because he has dealt with *Jesus* in accordance with what they require! The reason why God does not repay *us* according to our iniquities is because he has repaid his *Son* in accordance with what holiness demands (in perfect harmony, I might add, with the will and voluntary love of the Son himself)!

David wrote these words of hope and life from within the context of the Old Testament sacrificial system. He could confidently speak of such grace and kindness because he personally knew of the Day of Atonement, of the blood sacrifice, of the scapegoat onto whose head his sins were symbolically placed and transferred (see Leviticus 16).

In our case, on this side of the cross that forever and finally fulfills these old covenant types and symbols, we can confidently rest in the freedom of forgiveness because God has “put forward [Christ Jesus] as a propitiation by his blood” (Romans 3:25).

God did not willy-nilly cast aside our sins as if they were of no consequence. Rather, he “laid on him [the Son, our Savior] the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6b). God did not casually ignore the dictates of his holiness and righteous character. Rather, he “wounded” Jesus “for our transgressions” and “crushed” him “for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5).

This, and this alone, is why we can sing and celebrate that God does not and never will “deal with us according to our sins” or “repay us according to our iniquities”. The measure of God’s “steadfast love” (v. 11) is the depth of the sacrifice he endured in giving up his only Son to suffer in our stead (cf. Rom. 8:32).