

Mid-Week Devotion

A Fresh Start



Read Isaiah 44:21-23 *I have swept away your transgression like a cloud; and your sins like a mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.*

I am often surprised when I hear people talk about wanting to clean up their lives, that is make a fresh start. They talk about putting away those besetting sins, doing what is right, and going back to church. They speak of mending relationships, being better parents, and better spouses. They even talk about accepting the life that God wants for them. However, in all their talk, I rarely hear them speak of accepting God's grace. It is as if grace is something that only comes after they first do all these things.

When Isaiah declared the Word of the Lord, notice that he did not say, "Return to me, and I *will* redeem you." No, he instead declares, "return to me, for I *have* redeemed you." This is no simple play on words; rather it declares to us clearly, that we are able to return to God only because He has already redeemed us! Our sins have been wiped away, that means they are gone...forever! When Jesus said while hanging on the cross, "It is finished," He meant it; it was complete, not in part, but in totality. Remember, there is never anything we can do to add to our salvation.

M. Craig Barnes, once wrote, "I think the reason Jesus enjoyed hanging around with really big sinners was because they knew it was impossible to return to God by trying to clean up their lives a bit." It is interesting that those who were making some progress on the road to spirituality, never quite understood Jesus, while those buried deep in sin, seemed to see more clearly. In reality, we are all in too deep to effect this kind of clean up. Grace is our only hope; it was true for the Hebrews that Isaiah was speaking to, and remains true today, even for you. No matter how hard you try to clean up your act, without forgiveness, it is pointless for the guilt you are carrying will keep getting in the way.

As a pastor, I have observed that instead of believing that we are forgiven, many of us hoard our guilt, as if it was so valuable that we get to take it with us when we finally do make it home. We have come to so enjoy our guilt that we carry it with us wherever we go. When we move, we pack it up and take it with us. This is why thinking that you can make a fresh start by simply moving to a new place, often fails. Fresh starts only work when we leave everything behind, especially our guilt. This can only happen if you truly believe you are forgiven.

In Jesus, we have already received all the grace necessary to complete the journey home to our heavenly Father. So what's the point of dragging a lot of guilt with us along the way? Living life loaded down with guilt only makes it impossible to enjoy the life Jesus literally came dying to give us. Believe me when I tell you that in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. It is enough, so put down those bags of guilt you have been carrying because when you finally do get home, Jesus will have no use for them.

Pastor Ed