How Deep My Sin Memory Verse: Romans 6:23

Feb. 25th 2024 Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 3:12-19

SLIDE 1: TITLE

 We are currently in the season of the church year called Lent. This time has traditionally been used as a chance to fast, a chance to empty ourselves, humble ourselves and come before God in repentance. The church has long recognized our need for repentance, for turning back to God. It is so important that we have built it into our church year. It is a part of our regular rhythm. It is a time for us to focus in on what it means for Jesus to come and die on the cross. As we consider this pivotal event in history, I have used one of the great modern hymns to help walk us through this season. Last week we talked about the title, “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us.” And today we continue to talk about depth as we turn to ourselves and think about how deep my sin.

SLIDE 2: ARCHERY

I wonder how many of us have tried our hand at archery. It’s one of the things you might try at summer camp. I know a few guys who prefer to go hunting with a bow and arrow. In fact, my brother-in-law has a set of targets set up in his backyard so he can hone his skills. A few months ago, he actually used his bow and was able to bag a buck from a rear facing window of his dining room! I have certainly tried shooting an arrow, and I can make it go in the direction that I am facing for whatever that is worth. The first time you try it, the first time you pull the string back, you realize there is a lot more technique involved than it first appears. The process involves your whole body, from the stance of your feet, to the steadiness of your arm, to the way your fingers are holding on to the nock; that’s the end of the arrow that fits into the string. Then of course your eyes have to be properly focused on the target and some would say even your breathing comes into play as you line up to fire off an arrow. It’s a whole body experience.

**SLIDE 3: Archery is a full body experience.**

 It is certainly a skill. With some dedicated practice, anyone can improve upon such a skill. Maybe there is a great archer in us all. But, honestly speaking, in the real world, only those with the interest or the need are going to take the time to develop such a skill right? I may have the potential in me to accomplish a thousand different things, but in this lifetime, I am only able to truly become great at a few of those things.

 So why am I talking about archery on this second Sunday of Lent in a sermon titled, “How Deep My Sin”? Well, archery actually has a lot to do with sin. The Greek word for sin that we find in the bible is *hamartia.* When we see that word, we read it as “sin”, but *hamartia* literally means “to miss the mark”.

**SLIDE 4: Sin (*hamartia): To miss the mark.***

It’s a term that belongs to the world of archery. It paints a picture of an archer who carefully assumes the proper form, he lets fly an arrow, he squints as he carefully tracks it with his eyes, and when it misses, he grunts with disapproval or disappointedly shakes his head. He has missed the mark. Contrast that with the clenched fist and the shouted “yes” that results from a bull’s-eye. Two different results bring about two different responses.

 Well, today, I would like you all to consider that you are an archer. You have a goal: to hit the mark. You have a problem: if you miss, you die…and sometimes we miss the mark.

 In order to hit the mark, we have to know what it is in the first place. So what is the mark? What is it that we are shooting for anyway?

**SLIDE 5: What mark are we shooting for? God’s will.**

Broadly speaking, we hit the mark when we live into God’s will. That’s actually a pretty helpful framework. We can think of God’s will just like a bull’s-eye. In fact, in large part, we don’t even need the bible to know what God’s will is. That is not a statement you will hear often from me, but notice I said, “in large part”. Everybody on the planet understands that it is wrong to steal, that it is wrong to murder, that it is wrong to lie. We understand that adultery is wrong. We all understand that we ought to respect our elders. Humanity has a basic notion of what God’s mark entails.

**SLIDE 6: “natural revelation”**

We call this basic notion “natural revelation” and it comprises the outer edge of God’s will. But having aspects of God’s will come naturally, does not mean that we hit the mark. Knowing the mark and hitting the mark are two different things, hence we can rightly be called sinners.

 As we move into the next ring of the bull’s-eye, we will discover that there are definitely some parts of God’s will that we can only know from scripture. God’s word reveals to us God’s will. That makes sense.

**SLIDE 7: special revelation**

We call it special revelation and it is one of the reasons why we need to be reading the bible. In fact, many of us are reading through the entire Bible this year. I invite you to join us in that challenge. We have some reading plans in the office. It’s never too late to start and you can join our Facebook group as well as we walk through scripture together. Yes, it is an old book filled with history. Yes, it has small print and a convoluted timeline, at least if you read it from front to back, and yes, it requires us to extend our attention span, but, I am telling you, his word is life! Imagine trying to hit a target that you could not see? Not only can you not see it, but if you miss it, you die! How horribly frustrating! How terrifying! God’s word communicates to us God’s will. It reveals to us what it is that we need to shoot for! In that sense, God’s word is a gift! It’s a relief to know what it going on and what is expected.

I don’t know about you, but when I give a gift to someone, I want to see them use that gift or wear that gift. When they use the thing I got for them, it is honoring to me in a way. I take some satisfaction in knowing that I gave them something useful or something that they enjoy. I am happy with the fact that my gift is used by that person. I think you probably feel the same way. If we get excited knowing that someone uses a gift we gave them, how much more does God the Father enjoy when we dig into his Word and utilize his gift? But again, knowledge itself here is not the issue. It is all about our follow through…the result: Do we hit the mark?

**SLIDE 8: divine relationship**

Finally, the bullseye. The very center of God’s will, the heart of God. Here is where we move from natural, past special into divine. And we transition from revelation into relationship. The bullseye of God’s will consists of a divine relationship: Human beings coming to know the infinite God. This relationship is made possible in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we can send our arrows straight into the center of this bullseye when we come to a place of acknowledging and accepting what Jesus has done for us. The time is now, today is the day of salvation. How long do we want to keep shaking our heads in disappointment when we miss the mark? How long do we want to have to guess where the mark even is? An archer wants to hit the mark…how long are we going to tolerate being bad at this?

We can be in the realm right? We can be nearby the bullseye. Lots of good people live in the outer ring. These are decent people, nice people…it’s generally not all that difficult to be kind and courteous, to live by the golden rule. But being a nice person; that is not the mark.

And it is something to applaud when people read the Bible. It is a practice to be encouraged and a critical habit that will prove to be a blessing in someone’s life. But as wonderful as reading the Bible is…it still falls short of the mark.

This is the reality we all must face. Whether you are sitting in a prison cell, or in a comfortable chair in a cozy living room, we are all sinners. We all miss the mark. And missing the mark involves more than a wince and a walk to track down a stray arrow…missing the mark means death…our death. The bible is clear in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.”

**SLIDE 9: Romans 6:23, “The wage of sin is death.”**

That’s the best we can do. The highest paygrade we can muster, the pinnacle of our potential…death. We might be able to spend our lives practicing and improving our technique, but we will never be able to achieve the bullseye that is needed. The bullseye that can save us.

Someone might interject and ask, “Why does God require a bullseye? Couldn’t hitting the outer rings be close enough?” Can’t I be a nice person and regularly study my Bible and be close enough? The answer is: No, those outer rings are not close enough, because God is not ultimately interested in behavior or bible reading, he is interested in your heart.

**SLIDE 10: The outer rings are not close enough**

He is desires to know you and be known by you…a two-way relationship. That is what he wants, that is his will. Last week we mentioned Isaiah 59:2 which tells us that our sins, that is, our misdeeds, our wrongdoing, those times we miss the mark, have separated us from God. That is exactly what God does not what! The outer ring is close, but still separated. Listen to these words from Jesus as he expresses God’s will. READ John 17:21-23.

**SLIDE 11: John 17:21-23**

There is to be no separation. We are to be one with God; Christ in us and God in Christ-no sin left to separate. That is God’s will.

Only in Jesus Christ can we hope to land in the center of God’s will. Only by walking with Jesus can we begin to understand what it means to please God. We look to the second part of Paul’s thought about sin. We have learned that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Life is IN Jesus.

**SLIDE 11: Life is IN Jesus**

 That is an important preposition. It denotes our location. We are not to be located nearby, but IN. We are either in the bullseye or we are not. Our life is located in Jesus or it’s not. We live in relationship with him or we do not. Forgiveness for sin is found IN Jesus, we are saved in his name and we have faith in him.

Our sin runs so deep, our inability to hit the mark so profound, that what was required to fix our brokenness was nothing short of God himself becoming one of us, redeeming our life by living it perfectly, by hitting the mark every time and then facing the judgement for our sins. Taking on the cross, taking on what should be our separation. But instead of condemnation and eternal judgement, in Christ, in the resurrection we, like Jesus, can actually hit the mark. We can live IN the center of God’s will each and every day.

Once we have entered into this saving relationship with Jesus, once we are following him and trying to imitate him, we will also find that we are better able to live into the outer rings of the target as well. Jesus’ followers should be nice people who read the bible, but salvation begins in the bullseye; in the center. We cannot work our way in from the outside.

 If you recall, earlier I mentioned how archery is a full body experience…feet, hands, eyes, even breathing….following Jesus is the same way.

**SLIDE 13: Following Jesus is a full body experience.**

In fact, according to Jesus, the most important commandment makes this clear: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

**SLIDE 14: HEART, SOUL, MIND, STRENGTH**

This includes everything we are, everything we have and as we follow Jesus, as we practice and commit time to him our form improves. Our technique becomes more effective. Our feet stand strong in his word, our are become steadied by a growing faith, our fingers cling to his promises and our eyes remain focused on the will of God that lays before us as we breathe deep his goodness and grace. And eventually we can stand with the sun glaring in our eyes in a strong crosswind and still hit God’s bullseye from any distance. Thank you Jesus!

Can I invite you all to close your eyes. As we do I want to acknowledge that the very presence of God is here with us today. He calls out to each of us. He knows we are hopelessly terrible archers. He knows full well we are without hope. He knows death is all we can muster, and that reality breaks his heart. So in Jesus, we are extended and invitation to come to him, to live in relationship with him, to be redeemed. Please don’t ignore his call. Don’t disregard the gift. Today is the day to embark on a relationship with Jesus, today is the day to hit the bullseye!

I want to invite you enter into that relationship, to say “Yes, Lord, I am helpless with out you. I need to be saved, Jesus I trust you and I want to turn to you.” If that is you today, could you raise up your hand. Nobody is looking around, but it is a chance for you to acknowledge your need. Raise your hand if you would like to say yes to Jesus.

 There are those of us who have said yes to Jesus but the relationship has grown a little stale, we have strayed from the bullseye…we have settled for being nice people who read our bibles, but we have pushed Jesus to the side. If that is you today, would you raise up your hand.

 God is calling to each and every one of us. Some of us a responding for the first time, hallelujah! And some of us are responding for the 1,000th time…but all of us can live in a saving relationship with Jesus. You can put your hand down but let’s say a prayer as the band comes up.