

Life: A Hero's Story

Part 1: The Rescue / Sermon 3: The Rescue

September 22, 2019

Key Texts: John 19.18; Luke 23.34; Hebrews 9.22; Matthew 26.27-28

Key Words: CLTS, Dr. Kar, Poop, Crucifixion, Scourging, Sacrifice, Blood, Forgiveness

Summary: How could God get us to see our sin for what it is, and where it is taking us? With a cross God shows us the depravity and danger of our sin, how much he loves us anyway, and the way out.

Elder in the Prayer Room ...

Okay, guys: occasionally I start off with a parental warning. Most of our sermons are rated G, or maybe PG. But the real Jesus story has some extremely raw edges. And I'm not going to pull many punches this morning. So, some of you parents might consider some of the pictures that will be on screen and even some of words I will use at least a PG-13. So – we have some great kids programs going on right now. I'm going to pray, and while everybody's eyes are closed, if you want to slip out and drop a kid off, this would be a great time. Our guest services guys out there in the foyer will help you if you're not sure where the kids go. ... Let's Pray ...

Now we kicked off kind of a 3 month series a couple weeks ago we're calling, "Life: A Hero's Story." Real life, life as it was meant to be – my life, your life – we are caught up in a hero's story. This month is about the rescue. Next month, October, will be about living the rescued life. And then in November we will focus on our role as ... rescuers. That's where we're going.

And we've started it out by unpacking three things that make a hero a hero.

- #1: Sometimes the hero sees what others don't see. That was two weeks ago.
- #2: Sometimes the hero feels what others don't feel. Or they find intolerable what others have learned to tolerate. That was last week.
- And then, #3: then the hero does what heroes do ... no matter what the cost. That's today.

And over the past two weeks I have told you the first two parts of a ... human hero story. I want to tell you the rest of the story this morning. ... 12 years ago the British Medical Journal did a poll trying to identify the most important medical milestone of the past 200 years.

- Third place went to anesthesia. A huge milestone!
- Second place went to antibiotics. They estimate penicillin alone has saved maybe 200 million lives. Another huge milestone!
- First place was the surprise to me ... Sanitation. They believe that clean water and toilets have done more for our health than anesthesia, antibiotics, vaccines, X-rays ... you name it. Clean water and toilets.

But here's the deal: Even though the "sanitary revolution" started back in the 1800s, according to the World Health Organization 2.1 billion people still lack safe drinking water in their homes, and more than twice as many lack safe sanitation. And, when people lack toilets, they just do their business outside, often in some "common area." And the negative impact on health is devastating! Diarrhea, cholera, dysentery, hepatitis, typhoid, hookworm, roundworm, schistosomiasis, polio. The numbers that suffer and die will blow your minds.

Well, several international organizations decided they'd try to do something about the problem. And they started all these water projects and they started building latrines. One group was called "WaterAid." Their mission was to change lives with 3 things: Water, Toilets, and Hygiene. So, they funded latrines for some villages in Bangladesh. Then they invited an expert named Dr. Kamal Kar to evaluate their work.

And he found great latrines: well designed, well built, and some people even used them. But ... Dr. Kar said, "I'd go to the edges of the villages, and around every village there was still poop, everywhere." Everywhere he went, he'd step in it. Even with the latrines, they'd still do their business outside in these "common areas," or wherever. And as soon as the rainy season would come, the rain would disperse the poop throughout the villages. So they were still living in it!

You see, the experts had thought it was a hardware problem – if we can build enough latrines, we'll solve the problem. But the problem went way deeper than that. They were trying to fix a problem the people didn't know they had. The people didn't understand what a mess they were making, and they didn't understand how dangerous their poop was. You see, how can you fix a problem when people don't admit they have a problem? Even though it's killing them?

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So, Dr. Kar and his team developed a strategy they called, “Community-Led Total Sanitation,” – CLTS -- which is now used in 60 countries around our world. Here’s how a typical intervention might go.

- A facilitator will go into a village and ask, “Do you mind if I look around and ask some questions?” And once he attracts a small crowd, he will go on a “transect walk,” from one side of the village to the other.
- And while they are walking, the facilitator asks them, “Where do people ... poop.” Now, that’s not how they ask it. They don’t ask things like, “Where do you all go #2?” Or, “Where do you guys defecate?” Or, “Where do you all deposit your feces?” No, they use the rudest and crudest term they can, “Where do you all ... ____?” You fill in the blank. I’m going to say, “poop” here, but that’s not the word their guys would choose to use. And when the villagers show him, the facilitator just kind of ... lingers there for a bit.
- And the people are embarrassed, they want to move on, but he starts asking questions like these: “Did anyone poop here today?” And, “Whose poop is this?” And a few hands go up, maybe a few giggles. The stench is powerful, people are covering their noses, eager to move on, but the facilitator keeps asking questions, like: “Why is this poop more yellow, and this one more brown?” And then he starts asking about the flies. “Are the flies here often?” “Well, yeah.” And maybe there’s a chicken pecking at the poop ... because they do that. And he’ll ask, “Do you eat this kind of chicken?” “Well, yeah,” with a bit of embarrassment. He just keeps asking questions ... no opinions, no advice, no lectures, just questions.
- Then the facilitator takes his growing crowd to a large public space and asks them to draw a map of the village in the dirt. So, they mark the landmarks: the school, the church, the stream. And he asks them to mark their homes with stones or leaves. And they do.
- Once the map is done, the facilitator pulls out a bag of yellow chalk, and he asks the kids to sprinkle chalk on the common areas where people poop. He says, “Where there is more poop, use more chalk.” So, they start piling on the chalk. And the people kind of laugh, with some embarrassment; but the kids are having a great time.
- “Now,” he asks, “Where do you poop in an emergency? Like maybe it’s raining, or maybe you have diarrhea?” And again, a few giggles as people scatter more yellow chalk, often around their homes.
- Pretty soon, it’s pretty obvious that the whole village is covered with yellow chalk. And the people are unsettled now, anxious, disgusted, angry, embarrassed, not sure what it all means.

- Then the facilitator asks for a glass of water. He asks one of the ladies, “Would you drink this water?” “Sure.” He asks a few more, “Would you drink this water?” “Yeah.”
- Then he pulls a hair from his head and holds it up. “Can you all see it, clearly?” “No, not clearly, but kind of.” Then he walks to the nearest pile of poop and dips the hair into it. Then he comes back and swirls the hair in the water. And he hands the glass to one of the people and says, “Will you drink it now?” “No!” He hands it to another, “Will you drink it now?” And of course they all refuse. And he asks, “Why?” “Because it has poop in it!”
- Well, now the facilitator looks puzzled: “How many legs does a fly have?” “Six.” “Yes, and they are serrated, right? So, do you think flies pick up more poop or less poop than my hair?” ... There’s hesitation ... “More.” “Well, do you ever see flies on your food? And, do you throw it out, then?” “No.” ... “Then ...then ... what are you eating?”
- And the tension becomes ... unbearable. Because now they’re starting to see it! They have been eating each other’s poop for years! They are embarrassed, they are agitated, they are determined: “We can’t keep doing this! This is madness! How do we fix it?”
- But the facilitator doesn’t answer ... yet. He says, “You know your village better than I do. You can do what you want. You can keep on pooping the way you’ve always pooped, if you want, and eating each other’s poop.” But now they are determined. They don’t want to live that way another day ... if they can help it.

The strategy is brutal, and effective. They tell us that in Bangladesh the rate of open defecation has declined from 34% to 1%. I’m hoping they send a team to San Francisco. You see, they couldn’t see the truth – they couldn’t see the truth -- until they were made to trip over it.

And guys ... in so many ways ... in so many ways ... it is our story. Just substitute sin for poop. That’s shouldn’t be too hard to imagine. We have these common areas where a lot of us cluster to sin. But, in reality, we pretty much sin wherever. And I’m not the only one who steps in my sin. My sin messes you up too, and your sin messes me up. And we’ve been eating each other’s sin for millennia. And, maybe not always physically, but in every other way that really matters, it’s killing us. And we go through life oblivious, pooping wherever, and eating each other’s poop: filthy, disgusting, dangerous ... (break)

And we need ... some spiritual CLTS. We need a hero. We need someone who sees our sin for what it really is; who recognizes the depravity and the danger in

what we have come to accept as normal. We need someone who not only sees the problem but who cares; who finds intolerable what we have learned to tolerate. And we need someone who not only sees our sin for what it is, and who recognizes the danger it puts us in, but who is willing to do whatever is necessary to ... rescue us. And what God does ... staggers the imagination. ...

Now, the best we can tell crucifixion was invented by the Persians, maybe 500 years before Jesus was born. And the people of the ancient world used it to execute their enemies for nearly a 1000 years, until it was outlawed by the emperor Constantine. It was the most horrendous, despicable, disgusting way we had ever devised to kill a man. In fact, the Romans wouldn't ordinarily use it on citizens at all; they'd only crucify the worst of the worst, the lowest of the low. The Jews felt the same way about it. In fact, the Old Testament says, "Anyone who is hung on a tree is cursed of God." (Deuteronomy 21.23) And they thought crucifixion qualified as hanging on a tree. So, Jesus, they figured, was cursed by God.

But, even though we all knew how terrible it was, whether we saw it as a necessary evil, or whether we were just cruel, we still crucified thousands upon thousands of people ... it was terrible, and it was common. In fact, sometimes we would crucify thousands of people on the same day. After the Romans put down the slave revolt led by Spartacus, they ordered 6000 of his followers crucified, and they lined them up on a major highway covering about 120 miles. It would be like driving from Frankfort to West Virginia passing a cross on the shoulder of the road every 100 feet, 50 bodies a mile, for 120 miles. They knew what crucifixion was like! And even though crucifixion was outlawed by Constantine for its horror, men kept doing it, and still do it. The Nazis crucified Jews, The Khmer Rouge crucified their opponents in Cambodia, Muslims are still crucifying Christians today in Africa.

Now, I know we hang beautiful crosses on our walls, and we wear beautiful crosses as necklaces, and we sing catchy songs about the cross. But to really understand the cross is to be horrified, to be sickened, to be disgusted. In fact, they actually invented a word to try to capture its horror: "excruciating" – ex crucis: out of the cross -- agonizing, intense suffering, torturous pain.

Now, it appears they usually crucified men. They would often strip them naked – you see the cross was supposed to be humiliating, too. And often the crosses were short, barely lifting their victims off the ground. You see, they liked their victims at eye level, so those who wanted to mock them, and spit at them, and

make sport of them could look them right in the eyes. And crucifixions would draw out the worst of the worst, who WOULD mock them, and spit on them, and make sport of them. It does appear that occasionally they would crucify women too. In fact, I've read that they would turn the women around to face the cross, because even those as barbarous as the Romans struggled to watch women in such humiliating and excruciating pain. But I've never personally seen any solid evidence that they would turn the ladies around.

A lot of things could cause a man to die on a cross: dehydration, blood loss, heart failure, shock ... but apparently the most common cause was asphyxiation – the cross made it terribly hard to breathe. Guys who study this stuff – and they do, in great detail – they tell us that hanging by your arms like that over time makes it hard to inhale, and nearly impossible to exhale. The crucified man would have to pull himself up with his arms – pulling against the nails that were driven through his wrists, or push himself up with his feet – pushing against the nails that were driven through his feet ... he had to do all that just to breathe. And the weaker they got, the more they would slump and slouch, and eventually they would suffocate, choking on their own blood, and vomit.

Dying could take a while. Crucifixions were not intended to be quick deaths. They were designed to torture a man for hours, even for days. Excruciating pain, baking in the sun during the day, freezing at night – you are stripped naked, or close to it, unable to fend off insects, or birds. Unable to hide your pee, or your poop. It was the worst way they could think of to kill a man.

Sometimes, even before the cross, they would whip a man first. They did that to Jesus. To call it a whipping is too tame; maybe “scourging” is better. Their scourgings were so bad some guys didn't even make it to the cross. One of the soldiers would take a whip, not with a single strap, but with multiple straps of leather. And they would weave onto the straps pieces of metal, or bone, or stone, or glass. And they would tie the victim's hands to a pole and start beating on his neck, his shoulders, his back, his buttocks, his legs. And the cords of the whip would wrap around to his sides. And first they would bruise, and then they would cut, and then they would tear. If you saw the movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” they tried to make it real. Jesus' muscles would have been shredded; quite possibly his bones exposed; he was bleeding profusely. His body may have gone into shock, his blood pressure plummeting.

It's hard to even guess how much blood Jesus would have lost: blood from the scourging, blood from the crown of thorns pounded into his skull, blood from the nails. They probably wouldn't have hit arteries when pounding the nails into his

hands and feet, more likely just nerves. But cumulatively the blood loss would have been massive, and we've only got about a gallon and a half of blood in us.

So, this bloodied, disfigured, appalling man was given a cross to carry to the place of his execution. It may have been a new cross; more likely a recycled one – wood was more precious back then. So, it could very well have been stained with the blood, and the feces, and the urine of others ... like us, like ours. It probably weighed about 100 lbs – 100 lbs of rough timber with sharp splinters and rough edges ... laid across a back that had been torn open and was still raw. And though Jesus was relatively young and strong and fit, after a sleepless night, after a flogging that could kill a man, his physical body wasn't strong enough to get it done, so they had to get another man to carry the cross for him, a guy named Simon of Cyrene.

And when they got to a place called Golgotha – the place of the skull – it simply says, "They crucified him." That's all it says: "They crucified him." They didn't have to say more than that; because back then everyone knew what that meant. They'd been there, they'd seen that. They probably stripped Jesus naked ... because it wasn't just about killing a man, it was about humiliating him. Then they'd have driven these ... spikes, not really nails. They probably would have driven these spikes between these two bones right below your wrist – because if you drive a nail through the palm, it will tear out when you hang on it ... they tell us. And they would have driven spikes either through the top or the sides of his feet. They literally nailed Jesus to a cross.

Now, it would have been common for a crucified man to lose complete control of his bodily functions. He would cry, he would sweat profusely, he would bleed, he would urinate, he would defecate ... with no way to clean himself. Those ... are the sights ... and the sounds ... and smells of a cross. And the crowds would gather ... especially the lowest of the low. And they would get drunk, and they would laugh, and they'd mock, and they'd spit at him, and throw stuff at him. His family and those friends who dared be there would be crying, but the others would be mocking and taunting.

And most crucified men would cuss back, and maybe spit back at them – if they could ... but not Jesus. Jesus didn't declare war on them (he could have). He didn't cuss anyone out (he probably should have). He didn't call on God for justice (thank God). Instead he said things like: "Father, forgive them, forgive us, because we are ... clueless." (Luke 23.34)

What adds to our discomfort is, they wouldn't try to hide any of this, they'd try to crucify a man in the most visible, public place possible. It would be like watching all this going down in the Kroger parking lot. You'd be going to Kroger, and you'd see a crowd gathering in the parking lot, and you'd go to check it out ... and they are crucifying a guy. And the cruelest of the cruel just hang out, and laugh, and mock, and party. And maybe they'd go home; and the next day they'd come back and the guy would still be hanging there, struggling to stay alive, and so you'd party again. And finally, after a day, or two, or three, he'd be dead – still hanging there. Until finally, after letting the dogs and the bugs and the birds have at it for a while, they'd take the body and throw it in a dumpster. That's how they treated most crucified men.

So, Jesus hung on the cross for about six hours. He would struggle for every breath. He would push against the nail in his feet, and pull his arms against the nails in his wrists to raise up and breathe. Every thrust with his feet would send shock waves of pain through his body. Every twist against the nails in his wrists would be agonizing. Every movement of his mutilated back against the cross would be excruciating. Eventually he would be exhausted. Finally, the Bible simply says that Jesus breathed his last and he died. ... It was finished ... way more than we understood.

So Jesus was crucified, and he died. Sad story ... but not necessarily earth shaking. Thousands had been crucified before, and thousands would be crucified after. That Jesus died a terrible death is terrible, but not earth shaking. Now, his was unusual. Usually they crucified the worst of the worst, the most heinous criminals, or the worst of traitors. But Jesus was ... notoriously good! Which makes his crucifixion even more tragic, but still not earth shaking. It would make a great movie, a great hero story – a great man who dies without compromise. Life altering perhaps for those who hung on his every word back then, but for us, really?! But ...

You see ... centuries before Jesus, God had planted this notion, this seed, that had become pretty much commonplace by the time of Jesus. In their law, in their covenant with God this is how it worked. The book of Hebrews puts it like this: "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood (cleansed with blood), and without the shedding of blood (without the shedding of blood) there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9.22) Without the shedding of blood, your sins cannot be forgiven. So, they shed blood ... lots of it. The blood of sheep, the blood of goats, the blood of birds, the blood of cattle. They'd sacrifice an animal as an offering to God for the forgiveness of their sins. That was normal, for them.

And then along comes Jesus, and he says, "I'll be the sacrifice for the forgiveness of your sins." Say what?! Jesus says, "I am here to (be a sacrifice, I am here to) give my life as a ransom for many ... for you ... for every one of you." (Mark 10.45) Huh?! And at their last supper together Jesus took a cup, gave thanks to God – which when you think about it, is absolutely amazing, when you understand what was in that cup, and – he gave thanks and then he said, "All of you – all of you -- drink from it, because what's in this cup is my blood; drink my blood, because my blood will be poured out for the forgiveness of your sins. I'll be the sacrifice, my blood will cover your sins. I am here to create a new covenant between God and man with my blood ... so drink it!" (Matthew 26.27-28) ... How crazy is that?! How absurd, vulgar, disgusting is that!

But it's even worse than that ... horrifically worse. A human sacrifice?! No! There was human sacrifice in that world, but the Jews found the whole idea abominable, detestable, unconscionable! Human sacrifice was one of the worst sins in God's law. Jesus thinks he's going to establish a new covenant with God based on a human sacrifice?! Is that what Jesus was trying to do?!

Actually ... No! You see, that's what we don't get. The crucifixion of Jesus was not a man shedding his blood to cover the sins of those he loved. If that's all it was, it would be a noble death, but no more ... one of 10,000 noble deaths. No! This was no ... "human sacrifice." Listen: The one who created the earth was on that cross. The one who caused the darkness to come over the earth that noon, the one whose last breath stirred an earthquake that tore the earth, the one whose last breath tore the massive veil in the temple from top to bottom, the one whose last breath actually caused dead to rise ... the Son of God – the Son of God – was on that cross; the Son of God was the one who died. This was not the execution of a good man; this was our God, taking our place. If all you see is the death of a great man, you just don't get it.

But we recoil! Gods don't die! God can't die! Right? In fact, isn't that one of the fundamental pieces of being ... God?! Yeah! But he did. Because God can do that ... if he wants to. Steve Smith, our Worship Pastor had this pic up as a background a few weeks ago. It annoyed me, at first. It was too clean. Jesus looks too ripped, too alive. He doesn't look like a crucified man to me. Look at the guy on the right – he looks like a crucified man. And then it dawned on me, what if you really do understand that it was not just a man on a cross, it's God. They didn't kill God, we can't. That's God dying for us. That cross couldn't hold

Jesus. Those nails weren't holding him there. That spear they plunged into his side couldn't kill the Son of God. That's God giving his life ... for you ... for me.

And once we get that... If you'll finally get that, that moment of complete clarity ... You'll finally understand: That's God telling us what he thinks of our sin: our sin is killing us. It's that bad, that dangerous! And that's God telling us what he thinks of us: he loves us anyway ... go figure. To go to that cross for us?! And that's God providing us a way out ... a path to life. That's ... that's the rescue.

You see, God could have just washed his hands, of us. Or, God could have just scolded us, or lectured us, or reprimanded us. But for some crazy reason God still loves us ... his messy kids. But how could God really get us to understand that our sin – our poop – is killing us? How could he get us to see that our sin is stealing the life he wants us to live ... here and forever! How could God get us to see it for what it is, to refuse to tolerate it anymore, to accept his ... way out? Well ... that's God on that cross, dying for my sin, because my sin will kill me, without his help. He's trying to make all that vividly clear!

So, does that mean there was no God, for 3 days. No. The physical body Jesus used was dead; but God was still at work. What it means is that the penalty for our sin was paid, and our sin has been forever removed ... when we bend our knees to Jesus.

One more piece. How do I really know that's God on that cross? Because ... because 3 days later he walked out of his tomb. Because God can do that, too. You see, we think of death as the end. It's not. He proved that when he walked out of his tomb. He didn't just die for you, he rose ... for you ... to give you life. Because he is God ... and God will not ... let ... death ... win.