

## Devotion #1 - ROMANS 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Why does the National Weather Service issue severe storm warnings? Do they issue warnings so people can ignore them, because storms are never as bad as they predict? Do they issue warnings because they want people to try to do the exact opposite of what they suggest to prove their toughness? Maybe the National Weather Service is just plain mean: trying to keep people from having fun outdoors.

No, the truth is that the National Weather Service wants to protect us from real danger that we might not know is coming. This is why they tell us to seek shelter.

Ever since the fall into sin, God has intended his law to serve a similar purpose: to show us that we are in real danger in order that we might seek refuge in Him. Sadly, a lot of people don't realize this.

Many people think that God gave his law in order to show us how we can get to heaven. But this is not the case. The law demands that we possess perfect love toward God and our fellow man in action, word and thought. The problem is that no sinful human can ever love as perfectly as God demands. And, just as one bad link makes a whole chain useless, so also even one sin against the tiniest of God's commandments makes it impossible for us to earn heaven through the law. The Bible says: "*whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*" (James 2:10 NIV84)

And what do we deserve because of our breaking of his law? Our devotion text tells us: "*the wages of sin is death.*" Why does God give us his law and threaten us with hell? Is it because He is mean and wants to take our fun away? No, rather it's because He is caring and wants to save our souls from eternal death.

But is God really serious about his law? Maybe I can just ignore the warning - much like many people ignore the warnings the National Weather Service issue.

There is the problem with that: God's warnings are not something to ignore. We cannot "ride out" the storm of God's wrath over sin. If you remain in your sin and do not seek refuge in God's forgiveness, you will die eternally in hell. It's that simple.

Realizing the danger we are in let us seek shelter from God's anger over our sins. But, where can we find refuge? In God's own forgiving love, as our devotion text says: "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Yes, God wants to save you from His anger and punishment. This is why he sent Jesus in the world to suffer and die for our sins. When once asked how a person may be saved, the apostle Paul answered: "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved .*" (Acts 16:31 NIV84)

Confess your sins to God from the heart, and trust that He forgives you for Christ's sake, and you will find refuge from the storm - as the Bible promises: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" (Joh 3:16 NIV84)

## Devotion #2 - 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Imagine sitting in a school room next to the smartest guy in your class, who also happens to be your teacher's son. It's just the two of you. You are both handed the same test and told that you have to get every answer right in order to graduate. If you get one answer wrong, you will be punished.

You look at the test, and you don't think you can even get one answer right, let alone a perfect score.

Your classmate breezes through his test. After finishing, He whispers over to you: "Hey, look here: I left my name blank on my test. Give me your test and you can have mine. Don't forget to put your name on it before you hand it in!"

You slide your test over to him. He quickly erases your name and puts his on your test. Before you even have a chance to say anything, he takes your test to his father and shows it to him.

Your teacher looks at the test and tells his son: "Because you handed me this test, I have to punish you - even though you are my son. You know that, don't you?" "Yes, father," answers the son.

After watching your teacher punish your classmate, you glance down at the test he gave you. There's a little note. It says: "Trust me, these answers are all correct. I know because my Dad and I made this test."

You write your name on the test and hand it in. The teacher looks it over and says to you: "Well done, you got 100%." You graduate with honors!"

Even though my little story seems a little far fetched, it does illustrate our 2nd devotion text rather well. We all have been given the 10 Commandments and told that if we keep them perfectly in thought, word and deed, we can go to heaven. If not, we will die. The problem is that we can't even begin to show the perfect love God demands in his commandments. Let me show you what I mean. Jesus once said: <sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. . . anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. . . <sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:21-22,27-28 NIV84)

The point is this: no one can come close to keeping the law perfectly the way God demands; no one except Jesus, that is.

The Bible says that He was *tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.* (Hebrews 4:15 NIV84) Because Jesus was able to do this, he was righteous. What does it mean to be righteous? It means being right with God - perfect, and without any sin.

Jesus lived a perfect life, but instead of keeping this perfection for himself, He took our record of sin upon himself - so much so that when God looked at him, He looked like sin personified. Jesus went before God and said, "Punish me, Father, as if I committed these sins. Punish me, so that we might save the people of this world ." And this is what God did. When Jesus was on the cross, God struck him with the full fury of his wrath. When Jesus died our record of sins died with him. His resurrection from the dead is the proof that God accepted his payment for us. This is what our devotion text means when it says: "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.*"

And why did Jesus do this? *So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Just as the classmate in our illustration left his perfect test for us to put our names on, so also Jesus offers us His

righteousness (his perfect keeping of God's law) to be our own. And how does Jesus' righteousness become our own? Through faith. Just as, in our illustration, simply listening to our classmate and trusting his work allowed us to graduate, so also simply trusting in Jesus' work for us makes His holiness our very own.

And because we are covered in Christ's perfect record, we can approach God in confidence. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus - his perfect Son whom He loves above all else. And because He sees Jesus, He declares us to be his dearly loved children - heirs of heaven, eternal life, and every blessing He gives to His Son.

### Devotion #3 - REVELATION 21:4

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

Pain, sickness, hurt, and death . . . God did not create this world with these things. They are all a result of sin. They are reminders that our relationship with God has been broken, that we need a Savior.

And God provided that Savior in His Son. Everyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life!

But what exactly is this eternal life that God offers us?

The Bible tells us that Jesus is going to come at the end of time to create a new heaven and earth for his dearly loved believers. In this new heaven and earth there will be no sin, no pain, no problems and no death, only perfection. Just imagine what that will be like! Imagine the most beautiful nature scenes you can. That is what our future home will be like in the new heavens and new earth. The best part of it is that we will be with God - seeing him face to face and living with him in his house. We won't be afraid, because there will be no sin to make us afraid.

What will heaven be like? Revelation 21 and 22 describes it in fabulous terms: a golden city, filled with precious stones and an uncountable joyous crowd of people from every tribe, people, language and nation. But the truth is that heaven is so wonderful that *no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.* (1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV84)

Remember this truth no matter how difficult or sorrowful life might get. St. Paul says: "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18 NIV1984)

And so, just as we look forward to sunshine after rain, and the spring following the winter, so we look forward to the day Christ returns, and will deliver us, together with everyone else who believes in Him, into his eternal kingdom.