

February 21-25, 2022 Edition

Following
The Year Of ^ Jesus Part 8

Jesus Got Baptized- But Why? (cont'd)

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;o) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection:

Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him. After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." Matthew 3:13-17 (NLT)

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

Reflection: John the baptizer did not actually invent baptism. There were several purposes for baptism in the old testament. The first is similar to how it is used today – to demonstrate one's adoption into a new kingdom. Mikvehs, Jewish ceremonial baths, were part of the temple in Jerusalem. They featured a tub of water with steps going down on one side and back up on the other. In the center was a wall coming down from above and sticking down beneath the surface of the water. When a person had converted to Judaism, they finalized the process by stepping down into the waters, ducking themselves under the submerged wall, and coming up drenched on the other side.

This symbolized a person's death as a gentile and their rebirth into the Jewish nation. Men had one further step to become Jewish... circumcision... we'll get to that later. The early church adopted baptism as a symbol of one's initiation into Jesus' kingdom. This was different than the baptism of John, and those who considered themselves followers of Jesus, but had only been baptized with John's baptism chose to get baptized again as an induction into the early church. Initially, all converts to Christianity were Jews. They would have inherited the understanding of baptism as an act of birth into a new nation.

When the church spread to the gentiles (non-Jews) there was some controversy as to whether the new believers had to convert to Judaism first before they could become Christians. To resolve this question, Paul scheduled a meeting with the church fathers in Jerusalem, where it was determined that baptism alone was sufficient to demonstrate citizenship in Jesus' kingdom. Gentiles everywhere breathed a sigh of relief that the circumcision requirement no longer applied.

Today baptism is much less well known. When we offer a baptism service at Riverside we talk about its significance in Jesus' day. In our society, with so little ceremony and few rights of passage, baptism can seem downright odd. And baptism itself does not have the power to save us. Only Jesus can do that. So why do we get baptized? Well, because Jesus asked us to. There are two ceremonies that are unique in the Christian church in that Jesus participated in them, He told His followers to do them, and then the early church made them an integral part of the life of their communities. Communion is one of them (Jesus participated in it, He

told His followers to do it to remember Him, and the early church did as He asked on a regular basis).

The second is baptism. Jesus was baptized Himself (even though there was no need for Him to be baptized... He had nothing to repent of ;o) by John, He told His disciples to baptize every new convert in Matthew 28 & the in early church every single time a person decided to follow Jesus their next step was always baptism. We'll talk more about what Jesus' baptism means on Thursday but for today spend some time asking yourself, why did Jesus get baptized? What does it mean that He did it to fulfill all righteousness and what does that mean about how I should live my life?

Prayer: Father, help me to understand baptism more from your eyes. And give me the faith that even when I don't understand that I will still follow Your plan. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." Matthew 9:12-13 (TLB)

Peter fairly exploded with his good news: "It's God's own truth, nothing could be plainer: God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from-if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open. Acts 10:35-36 (MES)

Reflection: Yesterday we talked about one purpose of baptism, both in Jewish society and in the early church. Today we'll talk about two of the other uses of baptism in Jesus' day. Since John did not baptize his followers into the Jewish nation or into Jesus' kingdom, why did he baptize? I'm glad you asked! John called people to repent so that they would be ready for the coming kingdom of God. Baptism was used to represent purification from sin. Just as the Israelites made sacrifices for their sins, they participated in ritual cleansing when they had come in contact with something that made them unclean. Touching a dead body, for example, left one unclean. Baptism was a symbolic act of purification which symbolically cleansed the individual so he could once again present himself for worship before a holy God.

On a side note, by Jesus' day, wealthy pharisees were adding mikvehs (ritual baths) to their homes. The most elite religious leaders wanted to turn their houses into mini temples over which they could preside, keeping themselves pure from the dirt of the world. Jesus' practice of touching lepers and hanging around with sinners was particularly distasteful to these pharisees, who had invested so much in their own ability to make themselves presentable to God (and who looked down on others who weren't as "clean" as they were). Many who heard John's message that the kingdom of God was near wanted a fresh start. They took the opportunity to repent and wash away their sins in order to be ready for God's upcoming opportunities. But this was not the only purpose of baptism. If it was, Jesus would have had no need to wash away His sins. The Bible tells us that Jesus walked in our shoes and yet remained sinless. So why did Jesus get baptized?

Again, so glad you asked! The third purpose of baptism was to dedicate one's self to a work of God. Both baptism and fasting were used by those getting ready to embark on a mission

for God. Baptism showed a commitment to be born into God's work, setting aside an ordinary life lived for one's self. Fasting conditioned the "set apart" to recognize their own limitations and come to rely on God's revelation and power. Like Esther who fasted three days before her mission to come before the king, fasting strips away our physical routines to remind us of the spiritual world that goes unseen around us while we usually go about our day.

Baptism does something similar. It strips away our notion that we can control everything and that we understand everything. It is God's way of saying, do this not because you understand it but because you trust Me. It's the first step of those who wish to follow Jesus. It isn't graduation from Jesus University... it's induction into His early learners program. It's like a kid who goes to kindergarten. The kid doesn't show up and say, "here are my accomplishments... I deserve to get in this place because I already know everything you're going to teach these other losers." Rather it's coming to Jesus and saying, "I am here to learn, will You teach me?"

Baptism is the first step after a person chooses Jesus. It's an induction, not a graduation. The people in the Bible who chose to follow Jesus were all baptized immediately without exception. They didn't understand everything that baptism symbolized but they learned more and more as they went along. Before Jesus' ministry He presented Himself to John to be baptized. From that day forward His life was not His own. He dedicated Himself to the message and work of His Father. Each lesson, each miracle, each healing moved Him that much closer to the cross. But before He attempts any of these things, He turns to the wilderness to and the inner journey before the outer ministry.

Prayer: Father, teach me to trust You even when I don't understand Your ways. In Jesus Name I pray, amen.

Wednesday Reflection: Last week we talked about how Jesus' baptism "revealed His attributes". We learned that Jesus was God's Son, and that He would fulfill both categories of Messianic prophecies of the Conquering King and the Suffering Servant (want to know more about that? We looked at that concept in last week's reflections so you can download them or read them online on the website EagleRiverside.com under the documents download tab):

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." Matthew 3:16-17 (NLT)

With one sentence God revealed Who this Jesus was at His baptism. He does the same thing (albeit a tad differently) with us. He reveals our attributes with our baptism the same way He revealed Jesus' attributes at His baptism. So what do we learn about ourselves in baptism? Today we'll go step by step through many of passages in the New Testament that describe what baptism means and what it reveals about those of us who are being baptized and we'll start with something Jesus said to His apostles just before He ascended to His throne:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)

One thing that is revealed about us at our baptism is that we are “disciples” of Jesus. That word means SO much more than just student. A disciple wants to become like his/her Master. A disciple tried to act like their Rabbi, talk like their Rabbi and do all things as their Rabbi did them. They would often be seen trying to walk in the exact footprints of their Rabbi. If that’s what you and I are (disciples) then as we follow Jesus’ footprints we will eventually be led through the waters of baptism. There’s just no getting around it. Jesus did it. He told His apostles to do this for everyone who would eventually follow Him and for 2,000 years His disciples have been walking in the footprints of their Savior by following Him into the waters of baptism. But that’s not all that is revealed about us by our own baptism:

Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38 (NLT)

On the birthday of the church after Jesus’ ascension to His throne in Heaven Peter gave the very first “gospel sermon” ever heard (why wasn’t a gospel sermon ever heard prior to this? Because it took Jesus’ sacrifice to make the gospel a reality and this is the first time it can be offered to everyone). And in that sermon we learn a few things about our baptism. First of all we learn that when we are baptized it is revealed that we have forgiveness of sins and that we received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now some of you may be swooping down on the wording I used there. Wait a minute, Pastor Ed! Peter said that after our baptism we are forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit. Yes, that’s what Peter seems to be saying. And this is the passage on Baptism that the church I grew up in clung to above all others. We wanted to be able to graph out who’s “in” and who’s “out”. We wanted to be able to answer the question, exactly when is someone “saved”? But the trouble is the Bible isn’t terribly interested in that question. It would seem that based on this scripture that a map of when a person is saved and a pie graph indicating who’s “in” and who’s “out” would be easy to come up with.

But it’s not.

Let’s look at something that happened a few years later. The church was up and running. It was exploding. But up until this point in time the Christian church was almost exclusively Jewish. Enter a man named Cornelius. He was a Roman Centurion who believed in the God of the Jews. God sends an angel to Cornelius and tells him to send for Peter who would proclaim the gospel (the good news) to him and his family. God also sends an angel to Peter to tell him to go with the people who Cornelius sends. Why bother sending an angel to Peter. Because he might not have gone otherwise. For Peter to go to a Roman soldier’s home would have been scandalous. It would have caused a massive uproar amongst the early Christians so God sort of primes-the-pump with Peter to ensure Peter knows this is God’s plan for Peter today. Peter goes and while he’s preaching the gospel to them something very strange happens:

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone

withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Acts 10:44-47 (ESV)

What just happened? God did something seemingly out-of-order. He poured out His Holy Spirit on Romans before they were baptized with water. But I thought Peter said in Acts 2:38 that people receive the Holy Spirit after they were baptized. It did seem like Peter was saying that, didn't it? But here we find that God can and does do things in ways that we who enjoy mapping out processes don't really approve of. He saves who He wants when He wants how He wants. Cornelius and his family receive the Holy Spirit before their water baptisms (but you'll notice they still go forward with the water baptism after this amazing event). My next question is, does that mean Cornelius and his family were "saved" before their water baptisms? I would assume so but how could we tell?

I once had a guy come up to me after a lesson on baptism and he was a bit spicy when he told me that he had never been baptized. I said, "ok...". He then looked at me and asked, "so does that mean I'm not saved?" The first thing I told him was, "that's not up to me..." I'm not in charge of who's in and who's out. But secondly I told him, "no I don't believe that means you're not saved." We talked for a few minutes but he wasn't happy with me at all even though I didn't condemn him for not taking the step to be baptized. I told him I thought we put the wrong emphasis on baptism and that it's not about deciding who's in and who's out (which is what the church I grew up in taught) but it was just a natural part of following Jesus. That there wasn't one instance in the Bible of an unbaptized believer with one exception (can you guess who that was?). He left sticking to his guns that he would never get baptized. I just shrugged and told him that whether he gets baptized or not is not between him and me- it's between him and God and I'm not here to judge him- I'm only here to teach what I think the Bible says and then each person has to make their decisions on what to do but that's between them and God and not something I feel led to police.

Let me say this. Can a person be "saved" without having been baptized? Yes, I think they can. Should every follower of Jesus be baptized? Yes, I think they should. Our baptism reveals that we are disciples which means we do whatever our Rabbi asks us to do. It reveals that we are forgiven and that we received the gift of the Holy Spirit (when all that happens seems to be at God's discretion and there's not mapping it out to create a clean flow chart of salvation).

Tomorrow we'll look at some more of what our baptism reveals about us as followers of Jesus but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on your own baptism and what you thought it meant and what you've learned it means as you grow in your relationship with Jesus. And if you've never been baptized maybe spend some time thinking about why not. And if you'd like to talk it over just let me know.

Thursday Reflection: Let's continue talking about what our baptism revealed about us. As I pointed out yesterday baptism is one of the most controversial topics in modern Christianity. It wasn't that way in the first century. They had apostles still running around who could settle any debate about what baptism was/wasn't. Who should do it. Why they should do it. When they should do it. Where, how... you get the picture. In modern 21st century American Christianity we love to argue about this stuff and there's nobody who is the ultimate authority who can settle our differences. But that just wasn't the case in the first

century. One time when the Apostle Paul was on his way to Ephesus (in modern day Turkey) he ran across 12 people who were unusual to say the least:

Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" "No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked. They replied, "The baptism of John." Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus." As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:2-7 (NLT)

They had only been baptized with John's baptism. What does that mean? I'm guessing these were people who had heard of John The Baptizer- maybe one or more of them had even been at the Jordan River and listened to John and been baptized by him. But they had left Judea before Jesus showed up and they had gone back to Turkey where they were from. They were attempting to live lives of repentance and integrity as John taught. So these people had likely never heard of Jesus or if they had they didn't know much about Him- they hadn't even heard of the Holy Spirit. What does Paul do? Does he condemn them? Does he tell them they're currently "out" and not "saved" and that if they don't get-with-the-program then they're going straight to H E double hockey sticks? No. In fact, Luke refers to them as "believers". All Paul does is explain more about baptism and what do they do? They don't argue. They don't ask why they should have to get wet again. No. They get baptized. No fights. No arguments. Just humble obedience when they realize there's something God is asking of them that they haven't done yet. Wouldn't you love to live in that kind of world? Well, the task may seem daunting and you can't control what others who follow Jesus do. All you can control is yourself so if a world of humble disciples of Jesus living their lives looking for what else their Savior asks of them so they can hurry to follow Him the way He asks us to follow Him sounds good to you all you can do is start with yourself and let God use that however He will.

What else does our baptism reveal about us? Let's look at some more scriptures that explain:

In baptism we show that we have been saved from death and doom by the resurrection of Christ, not because our bodies are washed clean by the water but because in being baptized we are turning to God and asking him to cleanse our hearts from sin. 1 Peter 3:21 (NLT)

Peter says in baptism we are shown to have been saved from death and doom not because there's something special about the water but because in baptism we are demonstrating our willingness to turn to Him and that is what saves us. But wait... there's more! In his letter to the Christians in Rome (most of whom would have been gentiles) Paul says this:

Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. Romans 6:3-4 (NLT)

Here we learn that our baptism joins us to Jesus in His death. That our baptism is a metaphor for death, burial and resurrection. It's why when we baptize anyone at Riverside we generally have them plug their nose (some churches teach the minister to plug the nose of the

baptizee but I tried that once and it didn't work out too well so now I tell people to plug their own noses before I dunk them ;o) and lean back while I (or any other disciple of Jesus) leans them backwards into the water simulating being lowered in the grave. I leave them under for just a couple of seconds so they can take a moment and identify with Jesus' death which Paul says in our baptism we "join Him" in. Then we lift them from the watery grave of baptism where they live new lives just as Jesus lived a new life after His resurrection from the literal grave. I think it's worth noting that Paul isn't trying to convince the Roman Christians to get baptized- they've already done that and Paul assumes it and instead of trying to convince them he instead explains what this ritual that all of them participated in meant.

Then in his letter to church in Colossae Paul uses this metaphor to describe what happens in our baptism:

And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. Galatians 3:27 (NLT)

This is SO cool. One of my favorite descriptions of what's revealed at our baptisms but it's not readily apparent what Paul's saying since we're not first century people living in the Greco-Roman world that the writers and original readers of the scriptures lived in. Back then acting was different. There were plenty of plays that a person could go watch but the acting was different than it is today. Today we have character actors and those who want to play Macbeth or Hamlet or Ace Ventura or Hank the Tank don't wear special masks that everyone knows to be Macbeth or Hamlet or Ace. Modern actors try to act in such a way that even though you know the person in the movie is actually a famous actor but for an hour and a half that actor got us to forget who they actually are and instead allow ourselves to be transported to a place where we truly believe they are not the actor we know but instead the character they are portraying.

But in the first century there were costumes for all characters in a play. No matter who was playing Oedipus or Hermes or Zeus or Diana there was a standard costume including a mask that actors would wear and everyone associated the mask with the character being played. No body knew who the actor was behind the mask. All the audience saw when they looked at a specific actor was that they were clothed as whatever character they were playing.

Paul is using this imagery to explain something that our baptism reveals about us- now when God looks at me He doesn't see weak, flawed, messed up Ed- because I've been clothed-with-Christ. When God looks at me now He sees weak, messed up and flawed Ed but wearing the Jesus clothes/mask. Yes, God still knows it's me under there and He still knows my flaws and will send me opportunities to grow stronger based on those weaknesses but when it comes to my standing before God all He sees is Jesus. The One Who paid the price. The perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of Ed (and you too by the way). Isn't that the coolest thing you've ever heard? Thank God for our Jesus costume that renders us "righteous"- not because of my own righteousness but because of Jesus' righteousness.

And I'll leave you today with one last scripture that reveals something else about our baptism:

When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision- the cutting away of your sinful nature. For you were

buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. Colossians 2:11-12 (NLT)

What was circumcision. It was a sign, symbol and ritual that identified a person as a Jew (or not a Jew if they hadn't been circumcised). It was sort of an initiation ritual into the religion of Judaism. Paul says that baptism replaces circumcision as that sign in the Christian church. Our baptism reveals that we've been spiritually separated from our sinful nature. Does that mean our sinful nature no longer impacts us? No. This is another of those already-but-not-yet promises that God is famous for. Spiritually speaking baptism surgically separates us from our sinful nature. In reality we still deal with it but now our sinful nature will never have the last say in our lives. It doesn't have to define us. And again Paul points out that in our baptism we were "buried" with Christ and with Him we were "raised to new life". But why? Why did our baptism do that? Because as Paul points out- we trusted in the mighty power of God. Not because we trusted in the water that we got dunked in or because we fully understood what baptism is and what it isn't.

No. We are saved by trusting God and following in His Son's footsteps. Nothing else.

Friday Reflection: Ok one last thing about what Jesus' baptism teaches us- it teaches us that Jesus came to play a high stakes game of reverse-follow-the-leader. If you look at the Old Testament you'll find that is mostly a game of follow the leader. From the original inhabitants of Eden to the patriarchs of Genesis to Moses and the Israelites and the 10 commandments to the prophets God sends over and over and over and over to tell the Israelites how far off they've gotten- it's all a high stakes game of follow the leader.

Turns out humans stink at God's version of follow the leader. We have never been able to do it. We fail. Constantly. Over and over. Are you getting the point here? I think God knew we'd never be able to do it which is why when Adam & Eve fail God comes down and tells them that they will never be able to pay the debt they just incurred so He's going to send a Rescuer who will pay the debt for us. The Rescuer as it turns out will come to this earth and successfully pass all the tests that we failed while playing God's follow-the-leader "game". Turns out follow the leader is about nothing more than us developing the heart of God within us. At Jesus baptism this happens:

John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him. Matthew 3:14-15 (NLT)

What's happening here? John is confused. And who could blame him? Do you see what he's saying to Jesus? He's saying, this is all mixed up. Our places are reversed. I should NOT be baptizing You- You should be baptizing me. I'm standing where You should be standing and You're standing where I should be standing. And Jesus says, exactly right. That's exactly what's happening right now. Because I came to stand in the place of humans and pass all the tests and obstacles that they (we, me, you) failed to pass. I know it seems strange, Jesus says to John, but this is what I came for. Reverse follow the leader.

Theologians have a fancy word for this concept- substitutionary atonement. It's just a 10 dollar theological term that means- well, it means reverse follow the leader. Jesus comes to

take my place and successfully do all the things God has been trying to get us to do since the very beginning but that we have been extremely unsuccessful at actually doing right.

Now before I go on I should point out that not all views of substitutionary atonement are created equal. There are two basic schools of thought when it comes to substitutionary atonement- the first is commonly referred to as penal substitutionary atonement and carries with it the idea that God can't stand us. Kind of. That may be slightly ungenerous but for those who take penal substitutionary atonement to its logical conclusion I don't think it's too far off. The church I grew up in saw Jesus' work this way. Basically penal substitutionary atonement says that God hates sinners (not just sin but the sinners themselves) and that He created Hell not just for the devil and his demons but also for fallen humans. Depending on how far to the extreme edges of this view one goes, God is painted as a God who delights in sending humans who failed His game of follow-the-leader to this place of suffering and anguish. But, lucky for us Jesus swoops in and saves the day (and us) by paying the legal fees and the suffering the punishment that would satiate God's thirst for vengeance and now (almost reluctantly) God has to forgive us and grant us entrance to heaven because of what Jesus did for us. Some of you may find it hard to believe this view exists anywhere in Christianity but let me assure you- it is alive and well in 21st century Christianity. I grew up believing that Jesus had made a way for me to be saved if (and this was a very big "if") I now followed the leader flawlessly but if I stepped out of line then God was just waiting with His gavel to declare me "guilty".

I don't buy in to that view of substitutionary atonement. So how do I see substitutionary atonement? I think the New Testament paints a very different picture of a God who loves us so much that there was no end He wouldn't go to in order to save us. Yes, sin separated us from Him but not so much because of "legal" trouble but more like because sin makes us sick. So God sends the Great Physician Who will drink the poison that made us so sick and provide an antidote that will reunite us with His loving Father. Look at what one of the more famous Messianic prophecies from the Old Testament says:

Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. And by His wounds we are healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all. Isaiah 53:4-6 (NLT)

What is Isaiah describing? Substitutionary atonement. But with a nod towards the Messiah being a healer of sickness rather than a payment for legal troubles. Isaiah says that, "by His wounds we are 'healed'". Not "by His wounds we are pardoned". Is there some legal language in the Bible that leads the penal substitutionary atonement crowd to believe the whole legal system concept? Sure. But it doesn't really demonstrate the heart of God the way the concept of a healing substitutionary atonement does (in my humble opinion- some very smart people who have a much higher IQ than I do have and do believe in penal substitutionary atonement but I just don't see it myself). Ultimately you'll have to decide what you think about this but let me give you a couple more scriptures to consider why you're making up your mind:

Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous. Romans 5:18-19 (NLT)

This passage doesn't really tackle the differences between penal and healing substitutionary atonement but it does point out that Jesus came to swap places with me (and you too). He swapped places with Adam and succeeded where Adam failed. He would swap places with Abraham, Moses and King David. Every test they failed Jesus would succeed in. And finally He took my place on the cross to pay the debt I had incurred (nod to the penal substitutionary atonement folks here because this is the greatest argument in favor of the legal view of substitutionary atonement but I think this is more Jesus dying of the sickness we contracted when sin touched/touches the human spirit and soul) and to provide the healing every human needs in order to be who we were created to be.

He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. 1 Peter 2:24 (NLT)

What is Peter saying? He swapped places with me. This is where I was headed (not necessarily a cross but towards death and worse for sure) and so Jesus stepped in and took my place. But there's one more aspect to substitutionary atonement that I can't mention before we finish for today:

God made him who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

That's a very awkwardly structured sentence. It's not just the translating from Greek to English that makes it awkward- it's awkward in Greek too. I think Paul purposely made it awkward so we'd have to stop when we read it and say, "what'd he say???" What Paul is saying here is that God took the sin from me (and you) and put it on Jesus so that on the cross He would take the sickness that was slowly but surely killing all of us and put it all squarely on (or maybe more accurately He put it "in") Jesus so that it would lose its power to destroy us. Substitutionary atonement, right? Jesus took my place. He died of the disease that would have killed me, you and every other human that has ever lived if He hadn't stepped into my spot. But that's not the biggest reveal in 2 Corinthians 5:21. You want to know what is? I think it's not just that Jesus came and took the sickness that would kill me and in so doing took my place. But the biggest reveal is that not only did He come to take my place but He also came **so that I could take His place!** Not only am I saved from the sickness that would destroy me but I am given the standing of Jesus Himself because of... wait for it... substitutionary atonement!

Tired of reading the phrase, substitutionary atonement? Ok then I won't use it again today. We're almost done anyways. Next week we'll look at the time Jesus was tested in the wilderness by satan but for this week maybe spend some time pondering the concept I promised I wouldn't mention again and think through what you believe about whether it's a legal or medical concept.