

I've never been to New York City, but I do know that you can find just about anything you want and some things that you don't want there. Go to the Brooklyn Bridge to see the skyline, Broadway for entertainment, the Statue of Liberty for inspiration, Fifth Avenue to shop and Madison Square Gardens for a basketball or hockey game. One place you may want to avoid is the US National Debt Clock that shows our national debt and how much each family's share is. That debt is currently over \$21 trillion. That means your share is over \$242,000. The nation's trade debt has topped \$53 billion. The median American household income is \$59,000. But our average debt is over \$137,000. Clearly Americans are drowning in debt. There are a lot of programs and businesses that will try to help you figure out how to get out of debt.

But there is another type of debt we don't like to think about, or talk about. It is the debt of sin. One translations of the Lord's Prayer says "Forgive us our debts." The Apostle Paul tells us the wages or debt of sin is death. If heaven is the perfect place for perfect people, we are left with a perfect mess. Right now you're sitting there wondering why in the world you came to church today, to get depressed? That could happen without the hope that we have in Jesus Christ to forgive our debts and restore us to God's family.

There are two common responses to sin. The one response is legalism, thinking I can deal with it myself. But can we? So how do we do that? We try to be good, at least better than most. We try to earn points with God. We try to do more good things than bad. But the whole process will wear us out and lead us to despair because we never know if we've done enough, if we've been good enough. We hope God grades on a curve and we are on the right side of the curve. But we can't tell. All we are left with is uncertainty, doubt and hopelessness.

The other response is atheism, denying that God even exists. If there is no god, then there are no absolute rights or wrongs. So each person can decide for themselves what is right. But that does work and only leads to chaos. It is also leads to loneliness, thinking this life is all there is and there is no further meaning or direction for life. The atheist, who doesn't believe in God but does believe in himself has no hope of anything after this life ends. Neither way really works.

God has a totally different response to sin. God is too just to overlook sin. Sin cannot stand in His presence or go unpunished. But God loves people, everyone one of us sinners, too much to dismiss us. So God decided to do what we cannot do for ourselves. God decided to deal with our sins by placing them all on Jesus. Because Jesus is true God, He can pay for our sins. Because Jesus is a real person, He can take our place under the Law. The Apostle Paul tells us, **"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."** (2 Cor. 5:21 NLT)

Jesus paid the debt for our sins on the cross. God gave Isaiah this prophecy. **“He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be 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 52:5-6 NLT) Isaiah wrote about this as if it had already happened because God always has and always will keep His promises. Your sins and mine put Jesus on the cross. Jesus asked the Father to forgive from the cross and announced that everything was finished before He died. The price for sin has been paid in full.

Jesus’ body was taken down from the cross and placed in new tomb. The tomb was empty on Sunday morning. Jesus rose from the dead, victorious over sin and death. He did what we couldn’t ever do. Jesus gives us the free gift of eternal life.

But even His resurrection didn’t convince some people. Jesus’ enemies claimed the body was stolen. A Pharisee, a legalist by the name of Saul, was determined to hunt down and arrest the early Jesus followers. He got permission to go to Damascus to arrest the Christians there and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. Saul was convinced that he was doing God’s work. But Saul was wrong. Jesus confronted Saul on the Road to Damascus, blinded him and asked **“Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”** (Acts 9:4) Saul was clueless and asked who was talking to Him. Jesus told him to go to Damascus and wait.

Then God sent Ananias to Saul to restore his sight and restore him to God’s family because Saul would have a new purpose in life. He would become Jesus’ P.R. agent to the Gentiles. When Ananias came to the place where Saul was staying, Saul’s sight was restored and he was baptized. Not only did he regain the use of his eyes, but for the first time Soul could see that Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus changed Saul’s life that day. Saul the persecutor of the early Christians became Paul the great spokesperson to the Gentiles for the Christian faith.

Jesus has the power to change our lives too. Even if we don’t want to admit it, without Christ we are drowning in the debt of sin. We feel guilt for the things we’ve done wrong and guilt for the good things we failed to do. We feel the shame that guilt brings and try to hide our sin, guilt and shame from others and from God. But we can’t hide our sins from God. Like with Saul, everything changes when we meet Jesus.

When Nicodemus, a leading Jewish religious leader came to see Jesus at night, Jesus told Him, **“God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.”** (John 3:17 NLT) Our hope is in Christ. The woman who was caught committing adultery and brought before Jesus so He could condemn her found that out when Jesus asked, **“Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”** **“No, Lord,”** she said. **And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”** (John 8:10-11 NLT)

Like that woman, we are not hopelessly lost in our sin. We don't have to live in fear that we haven't done enough to earn God's favor. God already loves us. We don't have to go through life wondering if this is really all there is. Our hope is the good news that God loves us and welcomes us into His family. The debt for sin has been paid in full. The case against us has been dismissed. Paul, formerly known as Saul wrote, **“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.”** (Romans 8:1 NLT) We are free from sin, guilt and shame. We are free to live as God's people, to live the new life we have in Christ. Zachariah sang for us earlier today, **“Oh happy day, when Jesus washed our sins away.”**