

When *The Matrix* was released in 1999, it became an instant classic. That scene in particular resonates with us at a primal level. Neo is all of us who know deep down that there's something wrong with the world. He goes through his life every day sensing something is... off. Something is just not quite right.

During this series, we've been talking about that Something. In the Church, we call it Sin. Even though we can't articulate it, we know deep in our bones that we're off. That's because God created the world with a certain Order, a Way. But we've reject that Way. We've chosen to impose our own order, to follow our own ideas about what counts as Good and True. We've walked away from God, away from Life.

Obviously, that poisons our relationship with God. But it also - as we've discussed - poisons our relationships with each other. And even more than that, as the Matrix hints, Sin has set our whole world off-kilter.

To paraphrase Morpheus, Sin is the world that's been pulled over our eyes to blind us to the truth: that we're slaves. Born into a prison we can't see, taste or touch. A prison for our souls.

That's exactly how we've discussed the power of Sin in this series. That's what Sin is, what Sin does.

But. Last week we talked about the Good News of the Atonement. That even though we were trapped in Sin, even though Death had claimed us, God broke into our world, into our prison, to set us free.

God came to us in our brokenness and offers us healing. God removed every barrier between us and God. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God makes it possible for us to be at one with God again, like we were supposed to be.

The bottom line when it comes to the Atonement is that God has done *everything* for us. We were helpless, hopeless in our Sin and God did it all. God has removed every barrier between God and us.

So the question I want to consider with you this morning is: So what now?

What do we do next?

That matters, because when we talk about Sin and Atonement, how we couldn't do anything and God did everything, we can quickly end up in a passive place.

If I couldn't do anything, and God did everything, then... what? I just hang out?

No. God's rescue requires a response from us. Jesus' death is an invitation. He told his disciples as much in Matthew 16:

Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?" -- Matthew 16:24-26 (NLT)

Jesus stands before his disciples and offers them a choice - much like Morpheus did for Neo: you can stay here, in the life you know, in the life that's comfortable. Or you can follow me into the unknown. You can lay all this down. You can die to it.

Your way or My Way?

The Red Pill or the Blue Pill?

Do you stay here, where you're comfortable, where you know how to get along, or do you follow God?

Do you stay here, in Sin and Death, or follow me into Life?

This is *the* human tension. Do we stay where we know or step into the unknown? The familiar is comfortable to us. Even when it's unhealthy. Even when it's sinful. Even when we know there's something wrong with it. We have a tendency to stay where we know.

That's why we say, The devil you know is better than the devil you don't. Because even if where we are is painful, *at least we know it*. At least it's predictable. At least we know how to be.

Anyone who's ever had to make a big move knows that feeling. When my wife Amanda and I were about to get married, we had a big choice before us, there at the beginning of our lives together.

We could stay in Columbia, MO where we knew everyone, knew the town, knew how to get by. Or we could follow God's call to somewhere new. When we found the job posting for this Church, we had never been to Dayton. We'd only driven through Ohio. We didn't know what kind of crazy people we'd find here.

Setting off into the unknown is *scary*. It's obviously a lot easier and safer to start your married life around friends. But we knew God was calling us somewhere else.

So we had a choice: either stay where we knew, or follow God into a new adventure.

We all face that question in some form. Because if choosing our own way is sinful, then how we're living - even if it's comfortable - leads us to Death. So if we cling My way, cling to our selfishness (as Jesus says, if we try to hang onto our lives), then we'll lose ourselves. We'll die.

Now that God has reopened the Way to Life for us, we must follow Jesus through Death into Resurrection. The Scriptures call it Death because we're leaving the Ways we're comfortable in. We're abandoning our sinful, selfish ways, never to return to them. Our Old Selves are dead to us. Now we live for Jesus. We follow him. We take up his cross, his self-sacrificial ways.

And because we are moving back to God, we're actually finding life. That's why Jesus said, If you give up your life for my sake, you will find it.

This turning away from Sin, this taking the Red Pill, this laying down our lives by picking up our crosses, is called Repentance. The word literally means to turn around. To stop going the way you're going and go the other way.

So, to stop following the Sinful, selfish ways you've been following and choose to follow God's way. To walk away from your old life, your old Self and choose life.

The Scriptures are filled with people who've been faced with this choice between staying comfortable and following God, between death and life. One of the most famous is the nation of Israel. They were enslaved in Egypt (much like we are enslaved to Sin). Then - just like God does with us - God freed them. God did all the work to get them out of Egypt. God led them through a desert to a new land, the Promised Land.

There's a scene, right there on the edge of the Promised Land, where things get interesting. Israel sent some spies in to check it all out. The spies came back and reported that, to be frank, the Promised Land is scary. The cities are fortified, their armies well-armed. They said, We felt like grasshoppers compared to them.

So now Israel had a choice: They could either trust God to protect them or they could go back the way they came. They could either follow God into the Promised Land or they could head back to Egypt. They could either step toward freedom, or back into slavery.

And do you know what Israel chose?

They rejected God. They chose to stay in the desert. They chose a life of hardship, of hunger, of the wandering nomad because *at least they understood that*. The devil they knew was preferable to the uncertain future God promised them.

And the consequence was that they missed out on the Promised Land. They missed out on the rest, the new goodness God had for them. Instead, their children received God's rescue. That generation of Israelites died in the desert.

That's what's so counterintuitive about Jesus' Good News. He comes to show us that staying where we are, where we're comfortable *isn't* actually the best thing. It feels right. But it's not. Staying where you're comfortable is Death. Following God into the unknown is Life.

Israel chose poorly, and that resulted in Death.

As you can imagine, that choice became paradigmatic for what *not* to do. Psalm 95 is a hymn the nation of Israel used in their worship. It was written hundreds of years after that day at the edge of the Promised Land. The songwriter penned these words:

The Lord is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice today! The LORD says, "Don't harden your hearts as Israel did at Meribah, as they did at Massah in the desert. For there your ancestors tested and tried my patience, even though they saw everything I did. For forty years I was angry with them, and I said, 'They are a people whose hearts turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them.' So in my anger I took an oath: 'They will never enter my place of rest.'" -- Psalm 95:7-11 (NLT)

The songwriter says, Don't be like your ancestors! Don't reject God! Don't stay in slavery! Listen to God's voice. Not later, today! Right now!

When is the time for repentance? Now! Not later!

The writer of Hebrews picks up the theme of Psalm 95 when he talks about following Jesus. He quotes what we just read and then says,

Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.

Remember what it says: "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled." -- Hebrews 3:12-15 (NLT)

Don't turn away from the living God! Don't turn away from the Way of Jesus! Now is the time to repent! Now is the time to abandon your sin and trust God. If we follow God, we share in the life Jesus has!

A couple of thoughts about this call to repent:

Once when Jesus was teaching, he said, No one starts building a building without making sure he's got enough money first. Because you don't want to get halfway through, run out of money and have to stop. Count the cost before you start.

Now, Jesus wasn't particularly interested in contracting (though his step-dad was a carpenter). He was talking about repentance. He meant that this choice to follow him is a choice to die to your old Self. You're walking away from everything you know, the habits and behaviors that you find comfort in. You're embracing God's radical, counterintuitive Good News that calls us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us. The Good News that calls us to give our Selves for other people, not to fight for our own way or to protect ourselves. The Good News that sees wealth as dangerous and poverty as blessed. The Good News that offers strangers welcome, not suspicion.

Have you considered that? Are you ready for that? It's scary. But it's *better*. God's Good News brings us Life. Our ways only take us to death.

Obviously, then, Jesus' Way is not something you just give intellectual assent to. Repentance is much more than simply agreeing that Jesus is a pretty cool guy with some wise stuff to say. You repent with your whole Self - Mind, Body and Soul. We could say, You repent with your feet. Following Jesus is an action. You *follow*.

And the writer of Hebrews says *Today* make this choice. *Today* follow Jesus. He's talking to a group of Christians - people who are already following Jesus. That's important because we often think of Repenting as that think you do the first time you choose to follow Jesus. But repentance isn't something you do one time. Repenting has to happen every day.

Every day, I have to decide to walk away from my old self, my selfish self, my self that's learned how to be comfortable in a world in the shadow of Sin, and I have to walk toward God. To follow in Jesus' footsteps.

What God did was remove the barriers. [go to the door] Sin blocks the way to God - like we talked about at the beginning of this series, Sin cuts us off. We are separated from God and we can't get back. The Way is shut. The door is locked.

Hear Jesus' words to the Church in Revelation 3:

This is the message from the one who is holy and true, the one who has the key of David. What he opens, no one can close; and what he closes, no one can open. I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me. -- Revelation 3:7-8 (NLT)

Jesus says, I have set an open door before you. I have opened it and *no one* can close it.

Let me ask you a simple question: Is that how you think of your relationship with God? That the door to following God today is open and no one can close it?

Or is the door shut for you? What do you think is keeping you from God? What drawing you back toward Egypt? What's keeping you in the desert?

Is there some Sin you can't give up, can't get over?

Is there something in your past, something that's been done to you that makes you feel angry or unworthy?

Or maybe you're just busy? You've arranged your life so that you think following God is too inconvenient or too costly? You're trying to cling to your life, but in the process, you're losing your soul.

God has opened the door. God has removed every obstacle. Now you must repent. Choose the red pill. Step through the door.

Today is the day. Don't wait. Don't harden your hearts the way Israel did.

To stay where you are comfortable will only bring Death. Following God is scary. It's hard. But it's *worth* it. Because only those who give up their lives for the sake of Jesus' Way find life.

What does God require of us today?

Lay down your life, pick up your cross and follow Jesus.

That is how we respond to the reality of Sin and the Good News of the Atonement. We repent. We choose to trust God's better future.

Communion SetUp

Like Neo, we all know the world isn't right. We all know there's something wrong. And we know that we're trapped by it. We walked away from God's good life and locked the door behind us.

But Jesus died and rose again to free us from that. Jesus opened the door and now the way back to life is clear. No one can get in the way. No one can stop us from choosing God.

So, today, we have the same choice before us that the Israelites did. Do we choose to stay where we are, in the sinful, death-oriented ways we know? Or do we follow God into the uncertain future? Both are scary, but only one leads to life.

We celebrate God's open door, God's invitation by receiving Jesus' Communion Meal. We take the wafer to remember that Jesus gave us his body to be broken for our Sin. Jesus died to show us the consequences of our Sin. Jesus received the death we chose.

We dip the wafer in grape juice to remember Jesus' blood, which was poured out for us. Jesus' blood opens that door for us. We are freed because of his death.

For centuries, Christians have found meaning in marking our repentance with something memorable. So today, after you receive communion, consider the open doors here. If you are ready to choose God, to leave your sinful ways, come to these doors. They are open because nothing is standing between you and the life God is calling you to. God has removed every barrier.

These doors are open for everyone. Whether you've never chosen to follow Jesus before, or if today is another step in your journey, if you will lay down your life, pick up your cross and follow Jesus into the promised, better life with God, then mark that today by stepping through these one of these doors. They mark this moment for you. They remind you that through Jesus death and resurrection, God has put an open door in front of you that no one can close.

Prayer