

Sermon for Sunday, October 4, 1970 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
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"NO ANSWER IN THE BACK OF THE BOOK"

John 16:1-7

Text: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you." John 16:7

I was never very good in arithmetic in grade school. High school math was a nightmare. And the only reason I ever passed the required math work in college was because by then I was married to a sharp gal who could help me with my homework. I have always been grateful that I came along before modern math did! One of the reasons my children do well in math today is because I make it a firm rule never under any circumstances to help them with their homework. But back when I was in high school I made a wonderful discovery. They had answers in the back of the book. If I didn't know how--or didn't want--to work the problem, I didn't have to. I could always get the answer out of the back of the book. I didn't have to go through the discipline, the effort, the struggle of working the problem for myself. There was only one drawback to having the answers in the back of the book--I never learned any math.

There are still a lot of people around today who don't want to face life's problems. They don't want to go through the trouble, the discipline, the effort of working out the difficulties of life. They want some answers from the back of the book. Many people try to use Jesus or God that way. They find themselves in some tough spot, some unbearable situation, some unhappy position, and they cry out to God to take it all away, to give them the answer to life from the back of the book. Bill Cosby, the comedian, has a very funny skit about Noah and the Ark. Noah has been having a hard time. In the first place he has had to work very hard to build the ark, and second, all his neighbors are laughing at him and calling him Tarzan. Noah is herding the last of the animals into the ark and is pushing two big, fat hippos up the gangplank. Suddenly God speaks and tells Noah that he has two male hippos and he'll have to take one back and get a female. Noah has reached the end of his patience and gets angry with God. He tells God how hard he has been working and he's through with the whole business. If God wants a female hippo, he'll just have to change one of the males. God answers, "You know I don't work that way." When Noah starts to insist he isn't about to go get another, it suddenly begins to rain. Noah ends his rebellion rather quickly, "You and me, God. Right?" Now that's a very funny skit but Bill Cosby has his theology correct--God doesn't work that way. He is no answer in the back of the book. He doesn't wave a magic wand to change big, fat hippos or to remove all our problems and difficulties.

All of this leads me to observe that the people of Bible times understood two things right clearly. First, they understood the cost of sin very well. Let me hasten to define sin not as doing this bad thing or that wrong thing, but sin as alienation from God; sin as all of the breakdown in human life, human relationships, human society as a result of man's basic alienation from God. They understood what that alienation cost. We are not so aware today of the cost of sin. For

example, I was talking to one of my Elders in Lubbock recently and he was telling me about his three year old son. When he does something wrong he has been taught to say, "I'm sorry." However, this has begun to backfire on the parents. Now the child has the idea that no matter what he does if he says he is sorry that makes it all right. Consequently he can get into all sorts of trouble expecting to get out of it just by being sorry. Unfortunately he will have to learn the hard way that this won't work. His father indicated he was going to take the board of education and get at the seat of the problem.

But the man of the Bible understood the cost of sin. He knew there were no answers in the back of the books and a simple "I'm sorry" was not enough. For example, in ancient times when a shepherd took his finest sheep and offered it as a sacrifice to God for his sins, it really meant something. In the first place, he could hardly afford to give up his best animal and it represented a great sacrifice for him personally. He was, so to speak, paying the price of his sin. In the second place, as he gathered his family about him and as he slew the animal, he was acting out in a very dramatic and very real way the cost of sin. He was acting out in a visible, dramatic, symbolic way the fact that there are no answers in the back of the book. When the knife was put to the throat of the animal, when the red blood flowed in vivid reality, when the animal lay at last with its body convulsing in the final throes of death, one could hardly miss the visible cost of sin. So for a nomadic, flock-tending people who were dependent on their animals for clothing, for milk, butter, cheese, and meat, the loss of a fine animal was costly. The cost of sin in human life--the fact that there were no answers in the back of the book--was dramatically and vividly brought home to them. One was not likely soon to forget the picture of that dying animal that was so important to their livelihood.

Today, on World Wide Communion Sunday, a drama is enacted out before us. It is the drama of the cost of sin. It is a visible reminder that there are no answers in the back of the book. Represented before us today is a sacrifice. It is no ordinary sacrifice because it is the very Son of God himself. Sin--alienation from God--costs. Here is how much it cost.

For many of us this morning, the language and the imagery of Bible sacrifices have lost their impact and their meaning. We might understand the cost of sin in human lives a little better in our day if once a year we were to take the family car, smash the windshield, puncture the tires, rip the upholstery, and set the whole business on fire! Then we would more clearly understand that sin demands its pound of flesh, it exacts its dreadful toll, and its cost in human lives would be vividly and dramatically acted out in a costly and unforgettable way. Can you imagine the agony of a teen-age boy with a date that night watching his father sacrifice the family car? But I'll bet time would never erase from his memory the vividly real picture of the cost of sin enacted before his eyes.

Earlier I said that the people of the Bible understood two things right clearly. I said first they understood the cost of sin very well. Before you on the table of

the Lord you see symbolized in a graphic and real way the cost of sin--the very body of the son of God, broken for you; the very blood of the Son of God, shed for you. There are no answers in the back of the book for here is the cost of sin.

But the people of the Bible understood a second thing. They understood just as clearly that as their sorrow for sin, as their repentance of their sin, was acted out in a graphic, costly way, God healed the alienation and came into their lives, entered into their hearts, in a wonderful new way.

This brings us to our text for this morning. Jesus says in effect, "As I become the costly price of your sin, as I upon the cross become the symbolic sacrifice for your alienation from God, then God will come into your life, into your heart, into your experience in a fresh, new, wonderful way." Jesus put it this way, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you."

Just how real is God to you this morning? He can be the most real thing in your life. You see, you can have the very presence of God, you can have the very Spirit of Jesus, dwelling in your heart. How? First, see before you the very real cost of sin that took the very life of the Son of God who gave himself as a sacrifice for your sins. Second, repent of your sins, turn from your sins, renounce your sins. Third, let God's Spirit, the Counselor of God, into your heart and life to help you live a new life. You can't live a new life without his help. You can't be God's man or God's woman without his help. You will have to have his power working in you. Act out your surrender in a symbolic way. Act out your openness to God by taking the bread and wine and saying, "Lord, even as I take this bread and wine into my physical body, so I take Jesus into my spiritual body, into my heart, into my soul, into my mind that his presence might be with me."

You can walk out of here a new person, a new creation, a born-again person this morning. You can do it by accepting Jesus as the sacrifice for your sins, by turning from your sins, and by letting the Holy Spirit, the presence of God, into your life to give you power to live for him. It doesn't mean life will suddenly have no problems or that the road will be all smooth. No, there are no answers in the back of the book. But it does mean that whatever life brings you, you will have the presence of God to help you through them.