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Three Great Tragedies

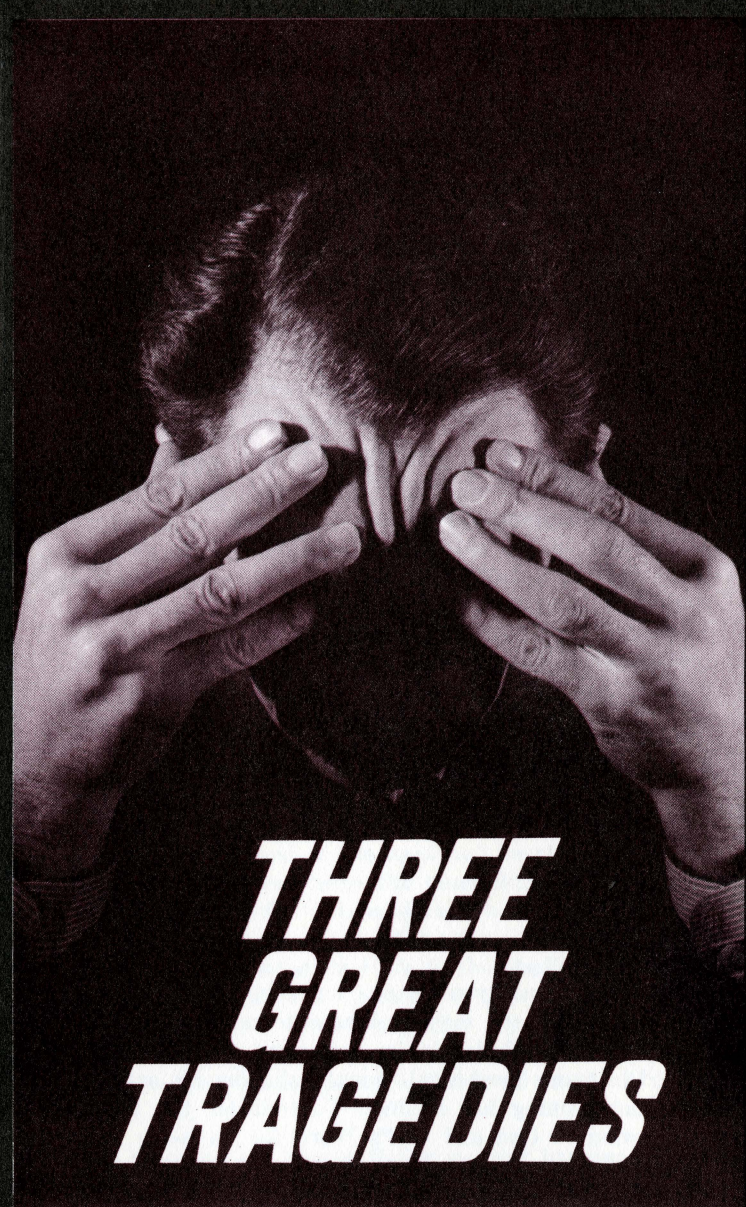
John Allen Chalk

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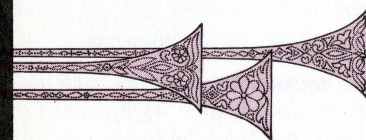
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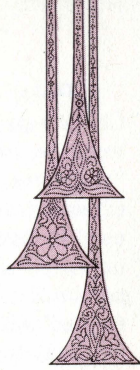


THREE GREAT TRAGEDIES



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HIGHLAND CHURCH OF CHRIST
radio program

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Three Great Tragedies

This program you are now hearing, Herald of Truth, is dedicated to the most serious concerns of human life and thought. Religion in its own right has always centered in man's most vital thought shaping his attitudes and determining his conduct. To consider the Biblical revelation of God and God's Word for us today introduces the most serious of all possible conversations. Christianity by its very nature as God's communication to modern man prompts two great reactions—inexpressible joy and profound tragedy.

I now ask you to consider with me “three great tragedies”—tragedies that we know because God has spoken emphatically and clearly regarding them. A Chinese proverb says, “The three great misfortunes are—in youth to lose one's father; in middle age to lose one's wife; and in old age to have no son.” There are greater misfortunes, however; and it is to those that we now turn for the next few minutes.

First, consider the tragedy of unforgiven sin. Christ's great message to the world says that “while we were yet weak,” and “while we were yet sinners,” and “while we were enemies” God provided the final and effective solution to sin. These exact expressions are used in Romans 5, verses 6, 8 and 10. “Christ died for the ungodly,” Paul explains in that reading. But even more personally and directly he also remarks, “Christ died for us” (Romans 6:8). “We are saved from the wrath of God by Christ's life and death,” the passage proclaims (Romans 6:9).

The wonderful news I announce today is that men need not remain under the condemnation of sin. God has provided His divine answer to man's spiritual plight. Christians are admonished to “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). That is our hope this very hour and that is God's word for you: “Forgiveness of all sins in Christ.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered extremely for the accomplishment of our release from sin's bondage. Even as the terrors of crucifixion bore on His physical and emotional strength, our Savior prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He lived and died for our forgiveness—gave his life a ransom for many,” Matthew declares (Matthew 20:28). We are told in Ephesians 1:7 that “we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” One can not honestly confront the Gospel records seeing the life and death of Christ without knowing His commitment to man's release from the burden of sin.

To further insure man's acceptance of God's gift of forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ, the Holy Spirit was sent into the world for the specific purpose of convicting the world “in respect of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment” (John 16:8). The individual who will listen to God's word for him today and will honestly consider its claims on his life can not remain in rebellion to God and enmeshed in the throes of sin.

The tragedy of unforgiven sin arises when any person refuses to be influenced by the extreme lengths to which God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit have gone to redeem man, to bring him back to a sound and whole relationship with God. Refusal to hear, believe, and obey the call of Christ as heard in the Gospel creates for every disobedient soul the personal and individual tragedy of unforgiven sin!

But also consider the tragedy of unacknowledged sin. The Biblical testimony regarding man's nature and failings speaks an undeniable principle—all men suffer from the guilt and reality of personal sin. Listen to the Apostle Paul, "... there is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22, 23). The Apostle John makes the matter even clearer when he writes, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). And again in the same first chapter of his First General Epistle John says, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him (God) a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:10). No concerned and sensitive man can successfully deny personal sin!

This helps our understanding and acceptance of God's stringent demands on mankind. Even though there was a time when ignorance was excusable, Paul explained at Athens, God "now commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent" (Acts 17:30). Peter asks us to remember that "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God desires and requests that each of us acknowledge our sin and accept His salvation.

We further establish the tragedy of unacknowledged sin by coming to understand the meaning of such acknowledgment. In I John 1:9 we are instructed, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." To confess sin according to Biblical teaching is to recognize one's need of God's saving power. We call on God out of our faith in Him and obedience to Him.

Christ, according to Hebrews 5:8 and 9, "learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation . . ." Jesus himself ordained the divine method by which our sins would be forgiven when He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). He also counseled His prospective followers, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3).

Today one acknowledges his sin through obedient faith in Christ, full renunciation of sin, public confession of the Lordship of Jesus, and baptism for the remission or forgiveness of all one's sins (John 3:16; Acts 2:38; Matthew 10:32, 33; Romans 10:9, 10). God hereupon

promises complete forgiveness and imputes or extends his righteousness to all who so surrender. The tragedy of unacknowledged sin lies in this very liberation from sin which can be ours according to the repeated promises and teachings of God's Word.

Yet, we sometimes say, "I have no sin." To which one inspired New Testament writer responds, "You deceive yourself and the truth is not in you" (I John 1:8). Or we often think, "I have sin in my life but it surely will not condemn me." To which another New Testament writer replies, "For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5).

Some of us even state, "I am a sinner and what of it?" John closes the last book in the New Testament canon with a message from Christ to those who think in this manner, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is" (Revelation 22:12).

Then there are always those who believe that sin is not real, who rebel at revelation and scornfully charge sin as "foolishness." The same Apostle John softly counsels those of this persuasion: "My little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous: he that doeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:7, 8). Oh! The tragedy of unacknowledged sin! God's word makes clear our manner of surrender, His directions for genuine acceptance of His grace are clear, His promises of forgiveness ample and convincing, but we stubbornly refuse to obey.

Finally, look with me at the tragedy of the hardened heart. Jesus taught, "Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:31). This startling remark becomes even more serious when we read the next statement, according to Matthew's Gospel, which our Lord made. "And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that which is to come" (Matthew 12:32). In both of these verses Jesus speaks of an unforgivable sin—a wrong that will not be forgiven by God. He describes this condition as "blasphemy against

the Spirit" which in the next verse just read is explained by the phrase, "speak against the Holy Spirit."

To properly understand this passage and to explain what I mean by the tragedy of the hardened heart, we turn to the parable of the Prodigal son and there learn of our loving, forgiving Heavenly Father who joyfully and fully receives all penitent and returning prodigals. In I John 1 we also read, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

These are but two of the many Biblical passages that reveal and describe God as our loving and forgiving Father. Yet, Christ speaks in Matthew 12 of a sin that will be forgiven neither in this life nor in the life to come. To properly reconcile these two ideas, a God who forgives all who repent and return, and a sin that is unforgivable, we conclude that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit involves that condition of the human heart, created by refusal to obey God, willful sin, open and sustained mockery of the Godhead, and such moral impurity, that one finally arrives at a state of mind and soul where he will not turn from evil to God. This is the tragedy of the hardened heart. Every step in sin and every willful act of evil brings one closer to such a condition of spiritual blindness and moral blackness.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the hardened heart in chapter six, where we read, "For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Jewish Christians were being admonished by this special letter. The author's greatest concern was his readers' possible apostasy from Christ. In this moving section Christians are warned of those who once knew God through Christ but lost that glorious estate through their own neglect. The most terrifying words of that entire passage reveal the tragedy of the hardened heart: "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." Whether once a follower of Christ or always in rebellion against Him, this condition is a tragedy!

I have noticed that the people who show the greatest concern either about committing the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or regarding the hardened heart are the

very persons who because of such interest have not been overwhelmed by this spiritual state. The hardened heart comes about through conscious, deliberate, and willful sin. It is a condition of choice, not chance. By that Biblical standard that makes repentance and return to God an act of one's obedient will, so the opposite state of rebellion and sin is created by an act of one's rebellious will. One New Testament writer says, "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26, 27).

It is in the recognition of this principle that one comes to an even more profound understanding of the tragedy of the hardened heart. This is that regrettable state described to Timothy as "branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:2). Do not allow your conscience to become seared by the heat of repeated rejections of God's call. I beg you, repudiate the indecision that darkens your mind and weakens the impulses for good within your heart.

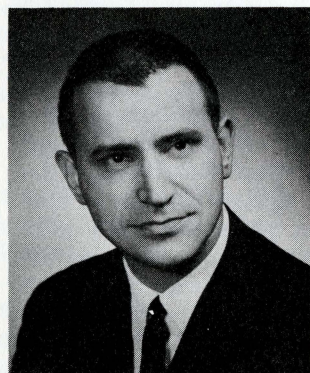
The three tragedies of unforgiven sin—because of God's loving desire to cleanse us of unacknowledged sin—because this is our method of surrender and obedience to God's grace; and of the hardened heart—because one is thereby removed from the possibility of repentance, spell eternal hell for their subjects. Do not be misled—the punishment for sin will be of the same quality and duration as the gift of eternal life to the obedient (Matthew 25:46). The last three chapters of Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, offer repeated pictures of rejected men whose lives are damned by the tragedies we have just discussed (Revelation 20:11-15; 21:7, 8; 22:14, 15).

Someone has said, "Misfortune and happiness come not of themselves, but only at the call of men." God has already indicated his gracious willingness to forgive us. He has even outlined in His Word, the Bible, how our surrender must occur.

Come to a mature faith in Christ as the Son of God through reading, studying, and accepting the Gospel witnesses to Him (John 20:30, 31). Hear God's demand for genuine repentance—the complete change of life that willfully turns from sin to God (Acts 3:19; 17:30, 31). Confess your faith in God's Son before men (Matthew 10:32, 33; Romans 10:9, 10). Receive the spiritual union

with Christ and the real oneness with God that occurs in the penitent believer's baptism. (Romans 6:3-11).

Live every day following your baptism as Christ would live and as the New Testament directs you so to live. Only in this way, God's way, will you completely eliminate the occurrence in your life of the three tragedies of unforgiven sin, unacknowledged sin, and the hardened heart.



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.