

What Christ Accomplished on the Cross: John 10:1-30
Ben Reaach, Three Rivers Grace Church
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This morning I want to step back from the details of Jesus' suffering and crucifixion and death, which are recorded for us in Mark's Gospel and which we've been looking at closely the past few weeks. I want to step back from Mark's narrative at this point and ask the broader theological question, What did Christ accomplish on the cross? In His suffering, in His crucifixion, in His death, what actually happened? What did His death accomplish, and for whom? These are the questions I want us to wrestle with this morning, and we'll look at a few different passages to do so.

What I want us to see is the specific and definite design of Jesus' death. I want us to see that Jesus died not merely to make salvation possible, but to accomplish the sure salvation of His bride, the church.

This is how our Statement of Faith puts it, from the 1689 London Baptist Confession. This is from the chapter on Christ our mediator. It says, "The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up to God, has fully satisfied the justice of God, procured reconciliation, and purchased an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father has given unto Him." A couple paragraphs later it also says this, "To all those for whom Christ has obtained eternal redemption, He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them; uniting them to Himself by His Spirit, revealing to them, in and by His Word, the mystery of salvation, persuading them to believe and obey, governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit, and overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner and ways as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation; and all of free and absolute grace, without any condition foreseen in them to procure it."¹

Some of that language may be a little difficult for us, but I hope to unpack some of what is being communicated there so that we can rejoice in all that Christ has accomplished for us. This is Good News. It is Good News that should give us greater joy in Christ, greater thanksgiving for what He has done, greater confidence in His power to save, and greater assurance of our own salvation. He has done it! We are not left to ourselves. It is not up to us. He has saved us, fully and completely. He bought us, redeemed us. He obtained our eternal redemption.

¹ 1689 London Baptist Confession, chapter 8, paragraphs 5 and 8.

He didn't just purchase for us the opportunity to be saved. This is how it is often envisioned. Many people think that this is what Christ accomplished on the cross. He bought the gift of eternal life, and then He puts it out there for us to receive or reject. He bought this incredibly great gift, and there it is all wrapped up ready for us to open it and receive it, but it's ultimately up to us to do that. If we accept the gift, then it becomes ours and our sins are forgiven and we will spend forever in heaven. But if we choose not to receive the gift, then it does not become ours and our sins are not forgiven and we spend forever in hell.

The problem with that way of looking at it is that it minimizes the radical power of sin in our lives. Because of our depravity, because of our bondage to sin, none of us would choose to accept the gift. That's how messed up we are—from birth. Paul tells us at length in Romans 3, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God." And Romans 8:7 says, "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." And that's exactly where we are all at by nature. We are born with a sinful nature, hard-wired to rebel against God, reject God, and go our own way. So even when this amazing offer of eternal life in the presence of God is put before us, we blindly and ignorantly and stubbornly reject it, because we are slaves of sin.

Therefore, Christ's death on the cross had to accomplish more than merely the offer of a gift. If He merely offered a gift, none of us would receive it. What I hope we can grasp this morning, and give thanks for, is that Christ accomplished not just the opportunity of salvation, but, as our Statement of Faith says, He certainly and effectually applies it to us. He persuades us to believe and obey. In other words, He purchases not only the gift itself, but also the grace to overcome our rebellion and actually persuade us to receive the gift. Or another way to look at it would be to see the gift itself as redeeming us out of slavery to sin and making us His own.

The main point is that He didn't just put an offer out there and then leave it up to us. He came to get us. He overcame our rebellion. He changed our hearts. He persuaded us to believe and obey. And all of that is part of what Christ accomplished on the cross.

Earlier in the Gospel of Mark there was a very important statement that Jesus made. In many ways, this statement summarizes the whole point of Mark's Gospel. Jesus said in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus came as the Suffering Servant. He came to be a sacrifice. He came to give

up everything. He came to forfeit His very life on behalf of others. He came to be a ransom for many. A ransom is the price paid to free those who are in bondage. Sinful humanity is in bondage—in bondage to sin, under the condemnation of God, deserving God’s just wrath. And Jesus paid that penalty. He stood in our place. He paid the ransom that was due to God in order to free us, “the many.” And as we’ll see in some other passages, “the many” are all those who repent and believe, they are the ones whom the Father has given to Jesus, they are the sheep for whom the Shepherd lays down His life, they are the church, the bride of Christ, the elect. This is the amazing news of the Gospel. Jesus died to free us from our sin, so that we might know Him and delight in Him.

Do you see the definite nature of that? He died for the many in a way that assures their salvation. It doesn’t just make it a possibility, dependent upon their free choice. It makes it sure. It’s effective.

So the short answer to the question, What did Christ accomplish on the cross, is: He died to accomplish the salvation of the elect. He did not die merely to make salvation *possible*. He died with a specific group of individuals in mind, and He died with the specific goal (which He, of course, succeeded in) of accomplishing their salvation. The intent of the atonement, the design of His death, was for the elect, that they might repent and believe and thus be united to Christ forever.

Christ Died for His sheep – John 10

Let’s look at this, first of all, in John 10. We see God’s sovereignty in salvation here in various ways. First, in verse 3 we read that the good shepherd “calls his own sheep by name.” This demonstrates the truth of election. God chooses, he elects certain individuals to be saved. He doesn’t have to do this. Some may ask at this point: why doesn’t He just choose to save everyone. But based on what the Bible teaches about the seriousness of our sin, the appropriate question is: Why does He save *anyone*? He would be perfectly just to condemn all of us to eternal punishment, because that’s what we deserve as sinful human beings. But He graciously chose to save many from the punishment of sin, and God the Father gives these elect ones to the Son. And the Son calls them. And He calls them effectually. They hear His voice and follow Him.

This is the biblical truth of predestination, or unconditional election. It’s unconditional, meaning God didn’t choose the elect based on a list of conditions that had to be met. He didn’t choose those who were good enough, because none of us are good enough.

It's unconditional election. His choice was based only on His own sovereign will.

Moving to verse 11, we see another component of God's sovereignty in salvation, namely, that Jesus died specifically for the sheep. This is sometimes called limited atonement (an unfortunate name). I think it's better to refer to it as definite atonement or particular redemption. The point is, He didn't just make salvation *possible*, leaving it up to our free will to determine who would become sheep. He purchased, in a definite and effective way, the salvation of His sheep. He laid down His life for the elect.

Are you beginning to see the nature of God's work in salvation? His will is ultimate, not the human will. He is moving with purpose and power to save those whom He chose from before the foundation of the world. This is a God-centered view of salvation. God is the determining factor in who becomes a Christian and who does not. In contrast, in a man-centered theology, the idea is that our own free will is the determining factor in who becomes a Christian and who does not. And I'm certainly not denying that we all exercise our will in either embracing Christ or rejecting Him. But what seems so clear from the Gospel of John (and the whole Bible) is that God's choice is ultimate.

If you turn back a couple chapters, you'll see in John 6:44, Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." And then in verse 65 he says, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." Salvation belongs to the Lord. It all originates in Him.

Charles Spurgeon, who preached in London in the 1800s, came to this realization early in his Christian life. He said, "When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me." So at first he thought, I'm the one doing this. I'm pursuing God. I'm the one making the determining choice. But then, awhile later, he says, "The thought struck me, *How did you come to be a Christian?* I sought the Lord. *But how did you come to seek the Lord?* The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, *How came I to pray?* I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. *How came I to read the Scriptures?* I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this

day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, 'I ascribe my change wholly to God.'"

So yes, we exercise our will and choose to read the Bible, pray, seek the Lord, and repent of sin and trust in Christ. But we couldn't do any of those things if God wasn't first pursuing us, if He hadn't first chosen us. We saw this in the verses from John 6.

We can also see it in chapter 10 verse 26, where Jesus says, "but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock." Think about this for a moment. If the human will was the determining factor in who is a sheep and who isn't, this verse would have to read differently, wouldn't it? If my choice is ultimate, then the verse would say, "you are not part of my flock because you do not believe." If Jesus said that, He would be making a different point. And it would then be possible to assume a man-centered theology that puts the emphasis on human free will. If Jesus said, "you are not part of my flock because you do not believe," it would be easy to assume that anyone could simply exercise their will to believe, and then become part of the flock. But that's not what the verse says. Jesus says it the other way around, "you do not believe because you are not part of my flock." God's will, God's choice is ultimate. He elects individuals for salvation, and gives them to the Son. The Son dies for the sheep, and effectually calls them.

In contrast to those who do not believe because they are not sheep, Jesus says in verse 27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." So how do you know if you're a sheep? Well, do you hear His voice? Do you hear Him calling you and leading you, and pointing you to precious treasures that are so much greater than the dull routine of worldly enjoyment? Do you hear His voice? I hope you are hearing Him right now in the midst of this sermon and these verses. The next question is possibly easier to discern: Are you following Him? Are you striving to obey Jesus' commands? Are you fighting sin and pursuing righteousness? Not in your own strength, or course, but in the power of the Spirit. Many may consider themselves to be sheep, but if they're wandering around following strange doctrines and worldly pleasures, they're not part of the fold, at least not yet. Because the sheep follow the good shepherd. Not perfectly. But He's our shepherd, and we listen to His voice and follow Him.

Finally, in verses 28-30 we see that God's sovereignty in salvation endures to the very end. "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." From start to finish, salvation belongs to the Lord. Jesus calls his

sheep, the sheep hear his voice, and they are eternally secure. The saints will persevere to the end. God will preserve them to the end. God's sovereignty in saving sinful humanity is seen from the very beginning to the very end. It is all his work, it's all by His sovereign grace. Left to ourselves, our hardened sinful nature would rebel against God for eternity. But God's powerful and effective grace breaks into our hearts and transforms us and keeps us believing!

Christ Died for the Children of God – John 11

Now I want to read you several other verses that describe this same reality, but with various other metaphors. In John 10, it's the Good Shepherd and His sheep. Let's look at some other ways that the Bible speaks of this. In John 11 the Jewish Council is discussing what should be done about Jesus for all the trouble He was causing them. And Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, speaks these profound words, speaking better than he knows or understands. He says, "You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." And then the Gospel writer, under the inspiration of the Spirit, gives us this commentary on the words of Caiaphas. "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." (John 11:49-52)

Christ died for the children of God. He died not only for the Jewish nation, but for the children of God who are scattered abroad. He died for a specific group of people, who will be from all nations.

Christ Died for His Friends – John 15:13

A couple chapters later in John, we find these words of Jesus: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13) And then He goes on to say to His disciples, "You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you . . ." (John 15:14-16) Jesus laid down His life for His friends. He demonstrated the greatest love known to man. He chose these friends and revealed to them everything He heard from the Father, and He died for them.

Christ Died for Those Whom the Father Gave Him – John 17

Then in John 17 we find another statement describing this group of people. This is the high priestly prayer that Jesus is praying to the Father. He says, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him." (John 17:1-2) Do you see the definite nature of this group of people? They are those whom the Father has given to the Son. They are the ones for whom Christ died. They are the ones to whom He gives eternal life.

Christ Died for the Church – Ephesians 5; Acts 20:28

In Ephesians 5 Paul is writing about marriage and how marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship to His bride, the church. This is an immensely practical passage for married couples. It also gives us some amazing insights into the intention of Christ's death. Listen to what Paul writes about Christ's love for the church. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Do you see the design and purpose of Christ's sacrificial death? He gave Himself up . . . for whom? For the church! For His bride! And He did so in order that He might sanctify her, cleanse her, purify her, perfect her. This is a glorious thing that Christ set His affections upon an unworthy bride, and chose to die for her and unite her to Himself.

Acts 20:28 also speaks of Christ's death as intended for the church. Paul is speaking to the elders in Ephesus, and he tells them, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." What did Christ's blood obtain? The church. He died for the church. All those who repent and believe, and are thus enfolded into the true church, they are the ones for whom Christ died. It is their salvation which He purchased on the cross.

Christ Died for the Elect – Romans 8

At the end of Romans 8 we find such wonderful and comforting promises. Romans 8:28 is a familiar verse and one that we go to often in the midst of trials. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Then this promise is grounded in a number of things God has done for us. This is an unbreakable

chain. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30) In God's purposes of redemption, He has a specific group of individuals in mind from start to finish. He chooses, He saves, and those who are saved make it all the way to the end and are glorified.

Then listen to how Christ's death relates to all of these promises. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." (Romans 8:31-34) It's important to note that when Paul writes in verse 32, "gave him up for us all," that same group of people he refers to as God's elect in verse 33. God gave up His own Son for the elect. Christ died for the elect. Christ purchased all of these amazing promises for the elect. God will graciously give us all things, and that is due to Christ's death for us.

That passage concludes with some more verses that are familiar to us and very precious. They are verses that assure us of our security in Christ's love. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39) This is similar to what we saw in John 10. Because Christ died for the elect in a definite way, because it depends upon Him ultimately, then we can have assurance that His grace will sustain us to the end. No matter what happens, no matter what trials may come, we will persevere, by His grace. We will not be separated from His love.

Christ Died for Individuals from Every Nation – Revelation 5:9-10

Finally, I want to go to the last book of the Bible and mention one more verse that speaks of those for whom Christ died. In Revelation 5:9-10 the heavenly chorus sings this new song to the Lamb. "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” Christ died, the Lamb was slain, His blood was shed for individuals from every nation. He ransomed specific people from all the ethnic groups of the world.

So we’ve seen that Christ died for His sheep, the children of God, His friends, those whom the Father gave Him, the church, His bride, the elect, individuals from every nation. These are various ways that the Bible uses to describe this definite group of people for whom Jesus died. His death accomplishes the salvation of these people.

Worship

In closing I want to emphasize again how this should impact us. This should be a great comfort to us to know that Christ died to really and truly save us. We never would have chosen Him. We never would have received His gift. But His death was so great and so powerful for us that He overcame our rebellion and granted us faith in Him. He ransomed us. He atoned for our sin, and He did so in a way that makes our salvation a sure thing, not dependent on our fickle desires or shallow decisions.

So this should be fuel for our worship. We should give thanks to God that He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and that He called us and justified us and that He will surely glorify us. We should find great comfort in the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We should meditate on and marvel at the truth that Jesus, our Shepherd, laid down His life for us, His sheep.

When you feel like you are weak and frail, when you feel like your faith is faltering, fix your attention on these truths. God is mighty to save, and He accomplished our salvation from beginning to end.

Evangelism and Missions

Lastly, these truths should give us great boldness in evangelism and missions. Some might say, “Well, if God chose individuals to save, and Jesus died just for those individuals, and they will certainly be saved, then what’s the point in evangelism?” And I think an appropriate response to that is, “Because God chose individuals to save, and Jesus died for those individuals, and they will certainly be saved, that’s the very power and confidence we have to go out and proclaim the Gospel.”

If Jesus merely died to make salvation a possibility, then we have a very discouraging task before us. Because then it’s the depraved human will versus our best methods of persuasion. And

that's a losing battle. But if Jesus really died to save, if He died actually to ransom people, if He is the One who will persuade them to believe, then we are guaranteed success. The success might not be quite how we would like to imagine it. We will need to be very patient and persistent in our efforts to communicate the Gospel to various individuals, we will have to invest a lot of time and energy and training and finances in order to take the Gospel to unreached people groups, but there will be success. There will be individuals who repent and believe. God has promised that it will happen. Jesus died to save individuals from every people group. So let's be emboldened by these truths, and let's glorify God for His amazing plan of redemption.