

The Centrality of Christ

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

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You may be seated.

Please open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter five verse 21.

Our obedience to Christ in that we learn many things about Christ and about ourselves. But also in our disobedience and in our frailty we learn much about ourselves and even much more about Christ.

It is always a terrible thing to be a conference speaker because Christians that possibly have not quite grown in maturity as they should think too much of men.

That conference speakers sin and are needy, desperately in need of grace always. No matter how mature you become, how wise you stand in the Word, how powerful in the Spirit it is always a result of extra measures of God's grace.

There never has been and there never will be such a thing as a great man of God. There are only weak and pitiful men of a great and merciful God. In looking in the mirror, if I had to define Christianity I would say a desperate person clinging desperately to Christ for the sake of Christ.

And why do I say for the sake of Christ? Regardless of our weakness and our sin and our constant need of grace, if we have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, Christ is beautiful to us. He is that pearl of great price.

I do not find much joy in simple morality or in trying to rise above my culture. I find joy in the face of Christ.

Young people, many of you are being taught and trained as I wished I had been taught and trained, but there is also a danger in that. Beware that you don't determine your goodness by simply judging yourselves in light of a fallen culture, but that the standard for heaven is Jesus Christ and his righteousness.

I have heard many reformed theologians say if a man wants to be judged by his own

goodness, then let him stand in the scale and then let the law be put on the other side of the balance and see how well he does. I would agree with that statement, but I would say something far more radical than that. Let a man step up on one side of the scale and then let Jesus step on the other side of the balance.

All our righteousness is like filthy rags and that is why Christ had to die.

I hope you are not choosing some sort of self improvement. I Hope that you are not seeking to be moral for the sake of morality because that is idolatry. I hope you are not wanting Christianity in order to have a good marriage. I hope you are not coming to Christ in order to have a clean family. I hope that everything you do, you do for him, for him, because all else is idolatry.

In moral philosophy we understand that for a creature to be reasonable it must have a reason for what it does, a greatest good. If you find a man standing out in the rain and you ask him why he is there and he can give you no answer, you have to conclude that he is an unreasonable creature. We must have a reason for all that we do. And if we are the pinnacle of God's creation it is just assumed that we will choose for ourselves the highest reason for what we do. And there is no higher reason than the person of Jesus Christ. There is no greater good.

If the Father is any judge of why we should be doing all that we are doing, then learn from the Father for he has done everything that he has done for his Son, for his Son, of his Son through his Son.

I am going to talk today about Jesus Christ, especially my burden is always to you, you youngsters. Your minds can be caught away to many detours that lead to dungeons and death. In all your home schooling get Christ.

Parents, in all your teaching, give Christ. I have found in all these years, though there has been some moral improvement in my person, when I look in the mirror that without Christ I am utterly desperate and without hope. So if I had all the combined morality in the world, the virtue of every man gathered up in a bucket and placed and given to me, I would still be like filthy rags before God. I need Christ. I need Christ.

2 Corinthians chapter five, let's begin in verse 20.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”¹

We are ambassadors. When an ambassador is sent out from a certain country to another his adornment, his clothing is extremely important. No country, no king wants to send forth a representative in tattered rags. Even our own capital was built in a certain way so as to communicate certain things about our country. We

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:20.

are to have some shine on our face. There should be something beautiful about us, something kingdom looking about us.

Yes, there should be morality. Yes, there should be a biblical morality. Yes, we should be moral people. We should seek to conform to every word that God has spoken. But we need even a greater beauty, something of the glory of Christ reflected from our faces.

But the only place you can get that glory is from Christ himself, seated before him, beholding him, worshipping him, meditating upon him, thinking about him. Christ and the gospel is not Christianity 101 and from there you go on to deeper things. There is nothing greater than Christ and there is nothing greater than his gospel.

I always tell students that everything you will ever want to know about the Second Coming you will understand on the day that it occurs, but you will spend an eternity of eternities in heaven and you will not even begin to reach the foot hills of the glory of God in the face of Christ and his gospel. It will be a tracking down, a chasing of the glory of God in the person of Christ. Be all about him, all about him.

Young woman and young man, I would... would that you would belong to Christ, that you would be a prisoner of Christ.

After many years of walking with Christ this is what you will discover. When Paul the apostle said he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus, a prisoner in chains, you will understand that it wasn't the cruelly fashioned Roman chains of which he was speaking so much. But the love of Christ in light of Paul's so many failures, the love of Christ placed him in bondage. The love of Christ constrained him. It drove him. It even made him do things he didn't even know why he was doing them. He was a prisoner of the love of God.

If you think that men and women down through the history of the Church that have been used of God were somehow driven by their love for Jesus Christ, you are so wrong. They were driven by Christ's love for them.

That is why John does not refer to himself as the one who loved Jesus. He looked at himself. Yet even as an apostle he looked at himself and he found no reason to speak or sing about his love for Jesus. But he called himself the one whom Jesus loved. And that is what motivated his life.

Now the love of Jesus Christ is seen in every manner of things. The very Atheist that clenches his fist and shakes it in the face of Christ does so by the power and grace of Christ who rains upon the evil and the good. Everywhere you look we see the love of Christ poured out on all men, not simply the elect, but all men.

Do you realize, young people, that this is a fallen world and that presents a problem? What is the problem? There shouldn't be any leaves on trees. There shouldn't be any clean water. There shouldn't be marriages in this world. There shouldn't be joyful births. This whole planet should look like a stage for Becker's *Waiting for Godot*. Everything should just be dark and grey and horrid. The fact that there is any laughter even out of the mouth of the wicked, any joy, is an expression of the love of Christ. And that is why men are so guilty.

Someone asked me one time what is the greatest sin society has ever committed? I said, "Well, there is many." But I said, "Possibly the day we landed on the moon."

He said, "What do you mean the day we landed on the moon?"

The day we landed on the moon demonstrated a brilliance of which no one had ever seen. That brilliance came from Christ. And all of mankind should have fallen down on their faces and worshipped God who gives such knowledge and intelligence through his grace to wicked men.

You see, this world is all about Christ.

And in one sense it knows it and rebels against it.

So the love of God is manifested in every shape, form and fashion in this world.

Child, know this. If your parents do not beat you, if they do not lock you in a dungeon, it is because of the common grace of Jesus Christ working in their life.

Every blessing, every bite of food, every breath that is clean Christ, you owe him much. You owe him everything.

Every moment not given to Christ is a moment wherein the King of kings is betrayed, betrayed.

Go ahead, young person. Live for yourself if you choose. But know that you are the greatest of all betrayers and you are demonstrating the coldness of a heart against the greatest manifestation of love, constant love. Even in your rebellion.

But there is one place where the love of Christ is manifested in a way unlike any other. And that is what we are going to look at.

It says in verse 21.

“He [God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”²

When I think of Jesus Christ, when I think about him walking on the water, when I think about him raising the dead, casting out demons, healing the sick, the blind, the lame, making the deaf hear and the dumb speak, I think it is absolutely phenomenal, but the most amazing thing apart from the cross that I see in the Lord Jesus Christ is that he was sinless.

I want you to think about this for a moment. There has never been one moment in all of your life that you loved God as God deserved, never once.

Sometimes when people ask me what is the greatest sin a man can commit I say, “Well, I suppose it is breaking the greatest commandment which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”

Never one time have you done that. Not once in all your life have you loved God as God deserves to be loved and yet every moment of the life of Jesus Christ he loved God as God ought to be loved.

Never once have you and I done what we have done perfectly and completely for the glory of God, never once. Yet there was never one time when Jesus did not do what he did perfectly and completely, absolutely for the glory of God. This is absolutely an amazing Savior that we have.

You see, in all your business, in all of the great and important things to think about, think about these things. Because the more you think about these things, the more you begin to reflect this beauty of Christ.

I suppose it is very, very important to study the classics. Children will read some of them.

My dear friend, we... I care very little for what the Greeks wrote. I carry little for all the things that were said by them when I have the perfect revelation of life in the person of Jesus Christ.

Do not boast that your child has this classical education. Boast that they know Christ and they make much of Christ and all they want is Christ, that they have almost become like a horse driving a carriage with blinders on both side of his face. The child does not want to know anything but Christ.

He was perfect. And yet it says that, “He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.”³

² 2 Corinthians 5:21.

³ Ibid.

Even the great reformers would shy away from this text. They would caution you whenever you approached it. What does it mean? We have to be very, very careful here. We can say too little and diminish the power of the cross or we could say too much here and blaspheme. What does it mean that Christ was made to be sin on our behalf?

Well, I think the answer is found in the text.

“So that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”⁴

When a person is justified, when a person believes in Jesus Christ they are not infused at that moment with some power that turns them into a perfectly righteous being never to sin again. Although regeneration does a lot to our heart, the genuine Christian is never free from sin and he does not consider himself to be a righteous being, but he considers himself to be righteous before God legally, forensically.

The moment we believed in Jesus Christ he legally or forensically declares us to be right with him. But don't forget this second part which is absolutely essential. He not only declares us to be right with him, he treats us as right with him. That is a freeing statement, my friend.

He not only considers you to be legally right with him, he treats you as right with him.

From that moment on forever because of Christ.

Now let's look back at Jesus Christ for a moment. What does it mean that he was made sin? Does it mean that when Christ was on the cross somehow his impeccability was diminished? Does it mean that on the cross his perfect nature was somehow deformed into some wicked thing?

Absolutely not. On that tree he always remained the spotless, sinless Lamb of God.

Then what does it mean? It means that on that tree your sin, your guilt was imputed to him. It was considered by God to be his. And God treated him as though it was his.

Do you see that?

You see, you revel in the fact that God has legally declared you to be right and he treats you as right with him, but the only way that could happen is because your sin, your guilt was imputed to Christ legally before the bar of God. He was treated as you ought to be. He stood as John Gill used to say in your law place.

Now I want you to think for just a moment. You and I, according to Job and many other texts, we are... we are exceedingly wicked. We are a people that drink down iniquity like it was water. In the same way that a fish cannot know it is wet, we know so very little

⁴ Ibid.

about the horrid nature of sin and the difference between purity, true purity and us. We know almost nothing.

When John Flavel wrote of Jesus Christ he says, "I write as one who writes by moonlight. I cannot write clearly."

When you and I think about sin we think about sin like dirty little boys sitting in pitch black darkness. We do not know how heinous our sin truly is.

You see, let me give you this example.

Imagine that a few of you fine ladies decide to go to the inner city and witness to some prostitutes. And while you are witnessing to the prostitutes the police come and they gather the prostitutes up in the paddy wagon and they identify you with them and gather you into the buggy with the rest. They handle you roughly and they throw you in behind the bars. The prostitutes are in there as the car makes its way to the precinct. They are filing their nails, telling jokes, cussing, laughing. This has happened to them a million times.

You are sitting there in that patrol car. You can hardly breathe. You are so ashamed. You are so frightened. You are so disgusted with the whole matter that has been attributed to you.

That doesn't even almost it should not be used as an example, because it doesn't even come close to what the holy Son of God experienced on that tree when he took our guilt.

Young person, as you grow older you will find something very unusual happening. That sins become more and more heinous to you. The things that you didn't even really notice in your earlier part of your Christian life now become almost like... like you have murdered a man.

You come to the point like old... one older brother I knew who just sat there at the kitchen table, an old man, a prophet of God and he did like this. He just slammed his fist on the table. I... I... I hate sin. I hate it.

But if we who are trained in sin can begin by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of Christ to begin to have such a hatred of sin, what was it like when the Son of God bore your guilt on that tree? Yes, he had to be deity. What else could sustain him under the crushing blow of your filth?

Now when he was on that tree, not only did he carry our guilt, he carried our curse. The divine curse that the wicked carry.

Now today, because of media and other things you think of curses as something that maybe a gypsy would cast upon you or that some witch might throw upon

you and turn you into a frog or something like that. It seems so harmless. It seems so comical, mythical. There is such a thing as a curse. And there are hardly words in the Bible stronger and more heinous and frightening than that word.

Every person in this room at this moment that does not know Jesus Christ is under a curse. And everyone who does know Jesus Christ was at one time under that same curse.

When I look through the Scriptures trying to describe, trying to bring about some fearful aspect, what does it mean to be under a curse, the closest thing I can come to is this. Imagine that in your sinful state without Christ you are standing before the judgment throne of Christ and not only in the presence of God, but all the holy angels and saints made perfect.

Now, children, I want you to think about it this way. Young people, youth, that your parents are standing on one side or the other as you stand before God, saints made perfect, the holy angels, the presence of God and yet you without Christ are in your sin and God pronounces judgment upon you, “Depart from me, you worker of iniquity. I never knew you.”

The last thing you will hear under that curse, the last thing you will hear as you take your first step into hell is all of creation standing to its feet and applauding God because God has rid the earth of you.

And in that great choir will be standing the very ones who gave you birth.

Do you honestly think that this is a game? Some of you have been to church so much it is so common to you and you do not realize that every day you attend you heap greater judgment upon yourselves. This is not a game. It is drastic. It is dangerous. It is horrifying and [?] demanded the death of the Son of God. Don't play with that truth. Don't treat him as common. The Father shows no mercy upon those who do not honor his Son and grow in appreciation with regard to what his Son has done for them.

Galatians, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.”⁵

Now how can we be free from that curse? There is only one way, that the Messiah, the mighty Christ.

As Samson went to those city gates and threw them upon his shoulders and carried them up that hill and slammed them to the ground defeated, so Christ had to take your curse, your guilt, your sin upon himself and take it to that hill.

⁵ Galatians 3:10.

Now, what does it mean that Christ became under that curse? What does that mean?

Well, first of all I want you to look at something. Let's just... you don't have to turn there right now. It is in Matthew five, starting with verse three. But there we have the Beatitudes. It is a description of the blessed. So if it is the description of the blessed then the counter of what we find in the Beatitudes would be something of a description of the cursed. It would show us something of what had to happen to Christ so that the Beatitudes, the blessing might be yours.

In the Beatitudes we have blessed... the blessed are granted the kingdom of heaven, but the cursed are refused entrance. The blessed are recipients of divine comfort, but the cursed are objects of divine wrath. The blessed are satisfied. The cursed are miserable and wretched. The blessed receive mercy. The cursed are condemned without pity. The blessed shall see God. The cursed are cut off from his presence. The blessed are sons and daughters of God and the cursed are disowned in disgrace.

“How are you doing today, brother?”

“Oh, I am blessed.”

Do you realize that the only way you can say, “Oh, I am blessed,” is because he was cursed? That... you see? You hear some words and you think, “Oh, I am blessed. I am this. I am that.”

The Puritans spoke this way that there were some words that were so mighty, so tender, so reverent that once they are spoken all should be silent and there should be nothing but a trembling of the lip. But a people who know God and the cross so little can never experience such a thing.

You say, “I am blessed,” and you stop and you think about it for a moment and you begin to weep. “I am blessed.”

How can it be I am blessed? How did I just say that? Because he was cursed. He was cursed. So I am blessed. He was cursed. I am blessed. I am blessed because he was cursed.

You see, they have taken the gospel and reduced it down to a little tract. And that is the only thing you know about the gospel and that is why you can't love God. Evangelical Christianity, the word evangelical doesn't even have any meaning because it has no gospel, no gospel to make you love God, no gospel to control you, to drive you.

Get the gospel. Know the gospel.

In the 27th and 28th chapters of Deuteronomy God divided the nation of Israel into two camps. One camp was placed upon Mount Ebal and the other camp was placed upon Mount Gerizim. The camp on Mount Gerizim were to cry forth all the blessings that would fall upon the head of the covenant keeper, of those who obey the law of God. And on Mount Ebal were pronounced all the curses that should fall upon the covenant breaker, the ones who have not kept the law of God. That would be you.

Now I say you and not we for a specific reason. It is the same for me, but I don't want to say we. I want to say you and not second person plural, but second person singular, why? Because I don't want you feel comfort in the fact you are surrounded by other people just like you. I want the Holy Spirit to grab a hold of your conscience as though it was one spot light beaming down upon only you.

You have broken all of God's law. You are the covenant breaker. And all of the curses of Mount Ebal should be poured forth every moment of on your heads. The only reason they are not is because those curses of Mount Ebal was poured forth upon the head of God's Son.

Let me say something that R C Sproul said a few years ago. I mention his name because he is a respected theologian and what I am going to say is going to sound so drastic. But if this is a shock to you then maybe you will begin to understand why the gospel is such a shock.

The Son of God on that tree, perfect, spotless Son of God, the Lamb of God on that tree when he looked up into heaven and cried out, "My God, my God, you have forsaken... why have you forsaken me?" Bearing the guilt of his people the Father slammed the gates of heaven and cried down to him, "The Lord, the Lord damns you."

And then upon him all the curses of the covenant breaker, upon him, upon the Christ fell.

Let me read them to you, but let's do this in the context of the person of Christ. It is as though the Father looked down upon him and said this. These are the curses.

The Lord sends upon you curses, confusion and rebuke until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly. The Lord smites you with madness and blindness and with bewilderment of heart and you will grope at note as the blind man gropes in darkness with none to save you.

Do you understand now why the day grew so dark?

The Lord delights over you to make you perish and destroy you and you will be torn from the land. Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the

fields. Cursed shall you be when you come in and cursed shall you be when you go out. The heavens which is over your head should be bronze and the earth which is under you iron. You shall be a proverb, a terror, a taunt among all the people.

Quoting directly from Deuteronomy, “Let all these curses come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed because you would not obey the Lord your God by keeping his commandments and his statutes which he commanded you.”

All of this that should have fallen upon you, fell upon him. The justice of God extending its hand, pointing its finger to condemn you. No. To the cross, to condemn him.

Again, from Deuteronomy, Christ bore our sin upon Calvary. He was cursed as a man who makes an idol and sets it up in secret. He was cursed as one who dishonors his father or mother, who moves his neighbor’s boundary mark or misleads a blind person on the road. He was cursed as one who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan and widow. He was cursed as one who is guilty of every manner of immorality and perversion, who wounds his neighbor in secret or accepts a bribe to strike down the innocent. He was cursed as one who does not conform to the words of the law by doing them.

The only covenant keeper that ever walked upon this planet carries the guilt of all the covenant breakers and their curse falls upon him.

It is an interesting passage in the book of Proverbs. It says, “Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.”⁶

A curse never had a cause to alight upon the Lamb of God until that day on that cross when you gave it reason, when your sins were imputed to him.

I always find it so amazing people telling me I have...

“Brother Paul, I have such a problem with this idea of Adam’s sin being imputed to me. I do not think it is right. I do not believe it.”

I say, “Well, you have cut yourself off from any hope of salvation.”

Why? Because if it is wrong for Adam’s sin to be imputed to you, it is wrong for your sins to be imputed to Christ and his righteousness to be imputed to you.

The psalmist David said this.

⁶ Proverbs 26:2.

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered!
How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And
in whose spirit there is no deceit!⁷

Yet on the cross the sin imputed to Christ was exposed to God and the host of heaven. He was placarded as Martin Lloyd Jones used to say before men and made a spectacle to angels and devils alike. The transgressions he bore were not forgiven him and the sins he carried were not covered. If a man is counted blessed because iniquity is not imputed to him, then Christ was cursed beyond measure because the iniquity of us all was imputed to him. He was treated as the covenant breaker.

In the renewal of the covenant in Moab there is a passage that seems particularly interesting in light of the cross, in light of the person of Christ. And the language seems a bit strange to me unless that somehow it is pointing to something greater than it self. Listen to what he says.

Upon the covenant breaker it says, “The anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. Then the LORD will single him out for adversity from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant which are written in this book of the law.”⁸

From our stock, from our flesh and blood was singled out one man. All his brothers were covenant breakers. He alone was the servant of Yahweh. He alone was the true Israel. He alone was the covenant keeper. He alone the Father with him was well pleased in everything he did. But on that tree he bore the guilt of his brothers. He bore their sin.

In the priestly blessing, let’s just turn there for a moment to Numbers chapter six for just a moment.

Numbers 6:24, the Aaronic blessing, the priestly blessing.

Chapter six verse 24 of Numbers.

The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.⁹

This presents a tremendous theological problem. Oh, if we could only see what a theological problem this blessing causes. This isn’t right. God cannot bless a wicked people or a wicked individual. It is wrong to pronounce this on anyone. How can anyone

⁷ Psalm 32:1-2.

⁸ Deuteronomy 29:20-21.

⁹ Numbers 6:24-26.

be blessed before God if God is just? If God is holy, if God is holy he cannot bless, place his favor upon the wicked. How can it be done?

There is only one way. The curse that was yours was placed upon him and the blessing that was his was placed upon you.

Let's reword this as it fell upon Christ.

In verse 24 it says, "The LORD bless you and keep you."¹⁰

But at Calvary the Lord curse you and give you over to destruction.

Verse 25.

"The LORD make his face shine on you, And be gracious to you."¹¹

But at Calvary the Lord take the light of his presence from you and condemn you.

The Lord, verse 26, "Lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace."¹²

But on Calvary the Lord turn his face from you and fill you with misery.

It is rarely that I preach that I don't mention this truth and for years I have had Christians, sincere Christians of 30 years, of 40 years in the faith come up to me afterwards weeping and say this.

"I always believed that Jesus died for me and I have always trusted in him, but I never could understand really why he had to die. I know it was because of sin. But how does his death... I mean, what does it do? Why was it required?"

So shallow is our preaching.

You see, here is the greatest problem that exists in all of Scripture. If God is good he cannot forgive you. Some of you are saying, "Well, why not?"

And that just demonstrates the ignorance of your age. Greater men than you would have known the answer to that swiftly. You see, you live in an age where there is no justice, where there is nothing right or noble left in the world. But, you see, if God is good he cannot pardon the wicked.

You say, "Well, why not?"

Well, let me give you a vulgar illustration.

¹⁰ Numbers 6:24.

¹¹ Numbers 6:25.

¹² Numbers 6:26.

Imagine you go home and find your entire family slaughtered on the floor and the murderer standing over them. In a rage you throw the man to the ground, but you come to your senses and instead of vengeance you demand justice and so you tie him up instead of killing him and you call the police. The police come and take him away to the prison. Months go by and he is finally presented before the judge and the judge says this.

“I am a loving and gracious judge, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. Therefore, I pardon you. Go home.”

And what are you going to do, little man? Are you going to do the very thing you demand God to do? Are you just going to walk away and say, “That was wonderful. That was absolutely wonderful. I am so happy.”

No. I tell you what you are going to do. You are going to write to Congress. You are going to call the president if you can. You are going to alert the media. You are going to write newspaper articles. You are going to say that there was a judge on the bench far more wicked than the criminals he lets go.

See, so there is a sense of justice in you after all that could not have evolved. You must be created.

So what is God to do? You demand justice here on earth. You complain when the tiniest offense is made against you.

Husband your wife doesn't behave herself properly, you become offended. Wife, you do the same. Children, anyone takes away any right of yours and you are ready to scoff and have their head off at the shoulders.

And yet you scoff because God is just. If God is just he cannot forgive you.

So the question is: How can God forgive you and still be just? Because God becomes a man and takes upon himself your guilt and he pays the price with his own life, with his own Son. He does the work.

Some evangelist will tell you, “Well, instead of being just with you, God has been loving.”

Therefore, logically, God's love is unjust. That is impossible.

No, God must be both loving and just. And it is not because there is some principle, universal principle over the head of God over the head of God to which he must conform, some statement of righteousness which he must obey. That is not the reason. God must be righteous because he is righteous. There is no inconsistency in his person. He cannot simply pardon. Justice, his justice must be satisfied and he did that through the death of his own Son.

Now again even though I have said this a million times I will say it a million times more if the Lord gives me breath. So many people look at the tree and they go, "Well, the nails, the crown of thorns, the spear in his side and all the physical suffering." And I don't want to take away anything from that. It was necessary and it was terrible, but if that is all you know about the cross, you don't understand anything about the cross.

I will hear preachers preach during, you know, Easter and such about the death of Christ and they talk about crowns of thorns and Roman whips and all these things and they never really tell anybody about the cross. It wasn't the pain of the cross was not a Roman whip and I will prove it.

When Christ is in the garden and he cries out, three times, "Let this cup pass from me, let this cup pass from me," he is under such anguish that sweat turns into blood. Is it, like some people say, that in his omniscience he had foreseen the cat-of-nine-tails coming across his back, the crown of thorns upon his head, the beatings, the mockings, the nails, the crucifixion? Is that what caused him to pray in such anguish in the garden?

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I can prove it.

Is it not true that for the next three centuries countless Christians died on crosses. Read the book of martyrs. Countless died on crosses. And the story goes that most of them went to the cross joyfully praising God that they had the privilege to die for Christ.

Now let me ask you a question. Are the disciples of Jesus Christ going to joyfully embrace a cross that their captain of salvation desired to avoid? Is the disciple greater than the master? Was Christ truly afraid of a Roman whip? What was in the cup?

There is only one biblical answer. Let me give you two passages. Jeremiah 25:15 and 16, but first Psalm 75:8.

Just listen.

"For a cup is in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams; It is well mixed, and He pours out of this; Surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs."¹³

Jeremiah.

For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them."¹⁴

¹³ Psalm 75:8.

¹⁴ Jeremiah 25:15-16.

What was in the cup? The wrath of almighty God was in the cup. God's holy, righteous hatred.

Now shall I finish this statement with God's holy righteous hatred for sin? Or God's holy righteous hatred for the sinner?

Now if I listen to all those bumper stickers I must understand that God loves the sinner and hates the sin, but if I listen to the Bible Psalm 5:5 I must understand that God hates all those who do wrong.

God does not send sin to hell. He sends men to hell because his wrath is against them.

You say, "Well, what about John 3:16? 'For God so loved the world' And the world is full of sinners."

Yes, it is true more true than you will ever know or I can ever preach, but what about Psalm 5:5? It is in the Bible, too.

See, that is the problem with modern day evangelicalism. It just picks what sounds nice and avoids the rest. But the rest is the saving part.

You say, "God is love. He cannot hate."

Do you love Jews? Then you must hate the Holocaust.

If I walk up to you and I say, "What do you think about African slavery in colonial America?" And you go, "Well, I am pretty much neutral on it. I don't think it was that big of a deal," then you do not love African Americans.

Do you love children? You hate abortion.

You see, if you truly love, you also truly hate. God loves with a passion that none of us could even begin to surmise and God hates. But his love is of such a nature that though his wrath is directed toward the objects of his wrath and rightfully so because they are wicked, his love is working redemption for them.

And what you need to understand and Paul is very clear in the book of Romans, especially chapter two, is that there is a sense in which God is looking at the wicked and his wrath is against them. But the mercy of God with one hand holds back his wrath and with the other hand beckons you to come.

And you say, "No, I will not."

Well, know this. One day maybe even before you die this merciful call may be stopped and you may be turned over to your own wickedness never to be saved. And know this. That even if the call remains your entire life upon death that hand will be pulled back and

all the wrath of God that mercy withheld from you will now be poured upon your head in heaping measure.

You are trying to make us afraid, preacher.

Young fool, listen to me. There are some things of which you should be afraid.

Just imagine for a moment you are in a little village about an eighth of a mile at the bottom of a huge dam and it is a thousand feet high and a thousand feet wide filled to the brim with water. And you wake up one morning to hear a crack, an explosion like nothing you have ever heard before and as you run to the window and then make your way outside you find that the dam, the wall has been breached. There is nothing left of it. And within a matter of seconds your entire village will be engulfed, the city of destruction.

The fleet of foot cannot outrun it. The strongest swimmer will be sucked down. There is no hope. And right before the rage reaches you, the ground opens up and takes it all in and not one drop splashes upon your pant leg.

Christ on that tree did that for you. He did that for you. No both know the severity and the love of God. The severity of God in that that dam was going to crush you and has crushed many.

Did you know this? Death is not natural? Well, death is as natural as birth. No, it is not. Death is supernatural. You don't think God judges men? Hundreds of thousands of men will be swept away into death this very day and most will wake up in hell. Death is not natural. It is supernatural. It is the judgment of God.

Imagine a mill stone 10,000 pounds upon the ground and another of like shape and size on top of it and they are hurling and twirling against one another and you take a little grain of wheat and you put it into the middle of them at first for just a microsecond the pressure is felt, the hull is burst, the insides are ground to powder and nothing remains.

You say, "Well, I will stand before God. I will argue my case."

You will melt before God like a tiny wax figurine before a blast furnace. But Christ he was that grain of wheat.

"For unless a grain of wheat fall to the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit."

Now I want to go... we are closing. I want to go to outside of the Scriptures probably my most favorite words every penned by the hand of a man. It is one of my most favorite writers, John Flavel.

Read the first volume of his works, *The Mediatorial Glories of Christ* and you will never be the same. He talks... he writes about a dialog in eternity between the Father and the Son. I call it the Father's bargain. Now just listen.

Here you may suppose that the Father to say when driving his bargain with Christ for you.

Why don't people write this way anymore?

The Father speaks. "My Son, here is a company of poor, miserable souls, miserable, that have utterly undone themselves."

Yes, young person, I know you grow up in a world that allows you to blame society for every wicked thing that you have done and allows you to even smile and smirk at a preacher like me. But now this. You have undone yourself. It will be your undoing and it is your society that you created.

And don't blame your fathers, the generation before you, because the fact that you do the same deeds they did shows that you are their sons. They have undone themselves and they now lie open to my justice.

Now listen to this.

Justice demands satisfaction for them or will satisfy itself in the eternal ruin of them.

You want to pay your own price for sin? It is an eternal death. Why so long? You have trespassed against an infinitely good God.

Another thing you should realize is this. Part of what makes hell hell is that you are turned over to you.

See, you are supposing the people go to hell and there they repent. They do not. I believe C S Lewis was on track when he said this that the door to hell is locked on the inside. If you were to throw the door open and say, "Come out, only bow to God's scepter," they would slam the door closed. I would rather rot in hell. Such is what happens to men when they are turned over.

So if there is any sense of wanting to know God in your heart at this moment, you better cultivate that. Don't turn away from God calling out to you, because there will come a point where you will hear no voice.

What shall be done for these souls? And, thus, Christ returns.

"Oh, my Father, such is my love to and pity for them."

I hear men today. "I don't want anybody's pity."

You need it whether you want it or not.

Such is my love and pity for them then rather that they should perish eternally I will be responsible for them as their guarantee.

Now this is one of the best parts.

Bring in all thy bills that I may see what they owe thee.

Now sometimes young men will get married and they will come back to my office after several months and they will go, "I had no idea it was going to be like this. I am not sure I did the right thing. I just wish I could turn back the hands of the clock for just a few long enough to get out of that marriage. What did I do?"

You see, before that they were all making great claims about the love that they had of this woman and how they would lay down their lives. And not now that they know the matter what it demands, their selfishness wants them to back out.

But, see, Christ says, "Father, bring in all their bills now."

When he went to the cross he knew exactly what he had to pay. He wasn't deluded. He wasn't romantic. He wasn't just thinking grand thoughts. He knew exactly, practically what he was going to have to do and he chose to do it anyways. But here is the most amazing thing. And, young men, think about this when you get married.

He did not die for a woman already perfect. He died for a tramp of a thing. For sinners he died. If he loved you that much when you were thus, how much more does he love thee? Do you see that?

And then he says, "Lord, bring them all in." And this is my most favorite part. "Lord, bring them all in so that there may be no after reckonings with them."

Saint, do you understand what this is saying? Bring in every one of the bills, Father? And when I pay, I pay in full so that they will never be dealt with again. Not one sin, past, present or future will ever again be laid at your feet in blame.

And that is why he considers you righteous. No after reckonings. No undiscovered bill. In his omniscience all was placed before him. He knew all. And he paid all. At my hand shall thou require it. I will rather choose to suffer their wrath, the wrath they deserve than they should suffer it. Upon me, my Father, upon me be all their debt.

And then the Father says, "But my Son, if thou undertake for them, thou must reckon to pay the last mite. Expect no abatements."

Do not expect me to lighten my hand because you are my Son.

And then listen to this. The first time I read it it kept me there. The Father looks to the Son and says, "If I spare them I will not spare you."

Believer, you don't know whether or not God loves you. You are unsure that he really cares? Listen to the language.

"Ok, Son, we will undertake this, but know if I spare this people I will not spare you."

And then, oh, what a charge, what a proof of deity. The mighty Christ. I can just... I mean, you can just see him.

"Content, my Father. Let it be so. Charge it all upon me. I am able to discharge it."

No angel, no man, no group collectively, no one can make that statement except God.

"I am able to discharge it and though it prove a kind of undoing to me."

Isn't it amazing the way love, true love, thinks so little about the burden it must bear?

"And though, Father, it be a kind of undoing to me..."

It will cost him everything. But his love for his people is such that it is kind of an undoing.

I recall where if a man is made a slave in the Scriptures and he has a husband and has a wife... has a wife and children given by the master and after his period of slavery is over and he could be set free but his love for his wife and his children is so great that he will go and tell his master, "I do not want to leave."

And the master takes him over to a threshold or post or a beam and takes an awl and puts him against the beam and pierces his ear with the awl demonstrating that he will be the servant. He will not stop at this task. He will be a servant permanently. And he does this for the love of his bride.

So Christ laid aside his glory in heaven and he became not just obedient unto death, but death on a tree. He became the servant of servants all out of love for his bride.

You see, eventually, young Christian, this is what is going to happen to you hopefully. Your weakness and your sin will no longer cause you to doubt God's love, but cause you to marvel in it.

Then he... you know... let me give you a lesson. Do you know the hardest thing you are ever going to have to do as a Christian, the most difficult thing you are ever going to have to do? Brace yourself. It is a monumental task. The most difficult thing you are ever

going go to have to do is believe that God loves you as much as he says he does.
Honestly. Honestly.

Yet what a marvelous task.

Though it prove a kind of a undoing to me, though it impoverish all my riches, empty all my treasures, yet I am content to undertake it.

I am going to finish just with an old story that you all have heard so many times. There is an old man who is called out of a pagan land by the name of Abraham. He believed the promise, the promise was finally given and then upon the giving of that promise, a great sacrifice was demanded. And I want you to listen to the language.

You see, if Christ... I know there... there... it is all the rage today. You know that this book has nothing to do with Jesus and this book in the Bible has nothing to do with Jesus. And this book of the Bible has nothing to do with Jesus.

I will tell you Jesus Christ is on every page of the Old Testament and if he is not it is nothing more than a book of morality. I don't need morality. I need a Savior.

But listen to his language. Tell me this could not have been written differently.

Tell me there is not more than what is being said here. He looks down at Abraham.

He says, "[Abraham,] take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."¹⁵

The old man obeys. He comes to the final point. After binding his child with rope, after heaping up sacrificial wood for fire upon him, all the things that had to be done, finally he takes the knife and the will of that old man is given in to the will of God and as he comes down God stops him and says this.

"Abraham, Abraham...Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."¹⁶

At the sound of the Lord's voice Abraham turns around and there is a ram in the thicket caught by its horns. He pronounces the mountain Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide.

I know that there are many teachers on TV and in Houston and Dallas and in so many other places of the world that flippantly say this statement.

¹⁵ Genesis 22:2.

¹⁶ Genesis 22:11-12.

“Jehovah-Jireh, he will give you a big house. Jehovah-Jireh, he will give you a Mercedes. Jehovah-Jireh, he will do this and that.”

They blaspheme. They are like unreasoning animals that do not know what they are saying. It is Jehovah-Jireh, God will provide a ram.

What do I care to have all the riches of the world? What do I care to have health and life? I am doomed at the end of 75 years unless there is a ram, unless there is a Lamb.

I need a Lamb.

And it draws to come close, the story, it draws to a close and everybody in the congregation breathes a sigh of relief. Well, that was a good ending.

There is only one problem. It wasn't the ending. It was the intermission. Generation after generation after generation, hundreds, thousands years pass and the curtain draws back open again. And there he is. God's Son, God's only Son, the Son whom he loves hanging on Calvary and God takes the knife out of Abraham's hand and lays his hand across the brow of his only begotten Son and slaughters him.

I wish I had a good voice. I would sing. I don't know what to do. What do you do now? What do you do? It is over. You are saved. And yet you are a prisoner to him.

God told Abraham because Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Abraham, “Now I know that you love me because you would not spare your only son for me.”

And the Church of Jesus Christ now looks up to God the Father and says, “I know you love me. I know you love me because you would not keep your only Son. You would not spare him, but you gave him.”

It is just amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

These are the kind of truths that disintegrate not only our reality, but our heart, that captivate us.

At this moment at the cross it is just like everything begins there for us. And everything ends there for us. It starts with him and ends with him. It is all about him, everything. It is about him. It will take your breath away.

Oh that God would give you a vision of the cross.

He died. He died. And he died and then... and then three days later up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph not only over his foes, but over mine. Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?

My captain, my captain has come to you and he has tore off the lid from your tomb and infused you with light. We are free from sin and death.

I will finish, I promise. Just go to just Psalms really quick. Psalms 24 is called the Psalm of ascent. And I know that I am now going to now be identified with old Puritans and will be accused of trying to take every text and twist it around to have it having to do something about Jesus.

But the question in verse three.

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully.¹⁷

Are there anyone here who qualifies? Anyone? No one. This condemns us. We all stand there shoulders drooped, our hearts broken in two. Death has come over our brow. There is nothing left for us. We cannot ascend. We can't go there. We are shut off. We are cut off.

But there was a man. There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, the man. Yes, fullness of deity, but don't be docetic. Fullness of deity also fullness of humanity, two natures without confusion, without either being lost. He is our Savior, God our Savior. He is a man, the man. And he qualifies. He qualifies. He qualifies. And so he ascends up into heaven a man and he stand there at the doors that are rusted and barred and he cries out in verse seven.

“Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in!”¹⁸

Can you imagine the shock on the other side? Who yells at these gates? Who commands these gates? Who would dare lay their hands on the latch of these doors? No man passes this way. And they cry out, “Who is this King of glory?”¹⁹

And then the mighty Christ answers back, “The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates, And be lifted up O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in!”²⁰

And for the first time in all of time those doors swung open for a man. When he walked through that door, oh, you talk about [?] Oh, every angel in heaven, you see, they are not like us. The first thing they ever saw when they opened up their eyes was him. And there he stands again before them, the mighty Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. And they fall down before him.

¹⁷ Psalm 24:3-4.

¹⁸ Psalm 24:7.

¹⁹ Psalm 24:8.

²⁰ Psalm 24:8-9.

All hail the power of Jesus' name.
Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him Lord of all.

Crown him with many crowns.

And that man Jesus Christ, can you imagine ascending up to the throne of God. Each step of his foot ascending and to sit down at the right hand of his Father. You see, that is why we can say that God is love. And not that he became love when he created.

See, he always has been love, because there has been more than one person in this God head. There has been a trinity. And the Father has loved the Son and he sees the Son and the Son is seated at his right hand. Can you imagine?

Maybe he said something like this. Maybe he looked at his Son and said, "Son, it is finished."

And the Son, "Father, it is finished indeed. I have done it."

When God could find no man to stand in the gap, when he was amazed and appalled that there was no one on earth to work his salvation by his own right hand he completed the work. His Son, the King magnificent and full of glory.

Religion, I scoff at religion. Morality is a small thing. Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ. Young, men Christ. Scoffer, Christ. Old man, Christ. Christ. Christ.

And the call of this mighty Christ to you is, "Repent and believe the gospel."

None of this praying a prayer and believe the gospel. None of this praying a prayer. None of this repetition after a religious authority, no. Repent and believe the gospel.

But my heart is cold.

Then go away and lock yourself in a room and cry out to God until he saves you.

Seek him and he will let himself be found by you. Repent and believe the gospel.

How will I know? Because the Spirit of God, by the Spirit of God assurance will be given? How will I know? Because the love of God will be shed abroad in your heart supernaturally and I won't be telling you you are saved. You will be telling me you have been saved. By his hand, by his hand.

Repent and believe the gospel. Repent and believe the gospel.

Father, I... it is like always. There is no way to get around this. There is no way to explain it. There is no way to understand it. It is so big. Father, please I am praying that you would open up the heart and the mind of people, that you will regenerate them. The graces of repentance and faith be granted, that they would press on violently into the kingdom. They would have a strong assurance of conversion, that they would go on bearing fruit. Oh, God, and raise up especially from our young men that will be, women that will be like candle wicks consumed by a flame.

For him, Lord, for him, for him, Lord, for him, for him.

In Jesus' name. Amen.