

The Son of Man a Ransom for Many

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Almighty and eternal and ever blessed God, thou who art glorious in holiness and fearful in praises, the God that doeth wonders, we bow before thee in humble adoration and praise. We bless thee for who thou art in thyself and we bless thee for all that thou hast done for us and for our salvation and we thank thee for every opportunity that we have of praising thy name. And we ask, oh God, that thou will take pleasure in the praises of thy people this night. We thank thee that thou hast given unto us thy precious Word of truth and beyond this sacred page we would seek thee, Lord. Our spirits year for thee, the living Word. Grant that we may come to the open book with an open mind and grant, oh God, that we may hear thy voice speaking to us individually and collectively. And may thy Word come as a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Hear our prayers. Be pleased to answer and be pleased to pardon our every sin. We trust thee to do these things for Christ our Savior's sake. Amen.

May I invite you to turn with me to the gospel of Mark and the 10th chapter of that gospel, the 10th chapter of Mark's gospel and I want to read from verse 32 down to verse 45. Mark chapter 10 reading from verse 32.

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.

And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?

They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.

But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.¹

I want to consider with you this evening what is universally regarded as the key verse of the whole of Mark's gospel. That is the 45th verse of this 10th chapter.

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”²

Very often when we think about the Christian message we think about it as something that is recorded in Scripture by certain men who were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. And that is perfectly true. And many books have been written which explain the meaning of the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many theories have been put forth about that atonement.

Here in this 45th verse of this chapter you have something that is of particular and peculiar significance because this is not a theory of the atonement. Here in these words you have given to you the unspeakable privilege of looking into the mind of the Son of God himself. Here you have the Lord of glory, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ revealing his own mind concerning himself and concerning his work of redemption. This is a verse that is telling us explicitly what he thought about his own death.

You are not considering here Dr. Dale's theory of the atonement. You are not looking at Calvin's view of the atonement or Hodge or Spurgeon or anybody else. Here you are looking at the work of atonement as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ saw it. You are looking at the cross through the eyes of the one who was to be crucified upon it. It is the meaning of redemption by the Redeemer himself.

¹ Mark 10:32-45.

² Mark 10:45.

And these words are fundamental in thinking about the death of our Lord Jesus.

And in considering them with you this evening I want to remind you, first of all, of the context in which these words were spoken.

Our Lord has been moving toward his last journey into Jerusalem. He is making his way to the cross. He has spoken about that cross in great detail to his disciples. Prior to the crucifixion they will gather together in the upper room and he will tell them that he will be leaving them and it is obvious that at this particular point the disciples are out of their depth. They are perplexed by everything that is happening around them. And on the road to Jerusalem Christ is striving out ahead of them setting his face as a flint to go to Jerusalem. He will not be deterred from what he is about to do.

The disciples are bringing up the rear. And as they are bringing up the rear we find that they are talking animatedly among themselves. Their conversation, however, is not about the cross. Their conversation is all about themselves. Their conversation is about the prospects which they felt were opening up for them in the coming kingdom of their master. And so when you read the narrative that Mark gives to us we are told that as they are walking along the road James and John come to the Savior and they ask him, "When you come into your kingdom, grant that we may sit one on the right hand and the other on the left." And they had obviously taken to heart our Lord's words on another occasion.

"If two of you are agreed concerning anything that they desire, it shall be done to them by my Father which is in heaven."

And they thought about this and they talked about that and James and John have said, "Well, we are agreed about this. But when he comes into his kingdom, we should have private place."

"Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire."³

And we are told that the other disciples were grieved, not because James and John had asked for these things, but the other disciples were grieved because James and John had asked for them first. They were all keen to have private place. They were all jockeying for position. They all wanted to sit on the right hand and one on the left in this coming kingdom.

So that Mark tells us that as our Lord is on his way to Jerusalem, their minds are about his kingdom, his earthly kingdom and their minds are fixed upon their position and their prominence within that kingdom so that in this critical time in our Lord's life instead of coming alongside of him and expressing their loyalty to him in terms of obedience and in terms of devoted service, these disciples are simply indulging themselves in their own self interest. Men who are full of their own estimations of their spirituality, so much so that they cannot see the significance of what is happening in front of their eyes, men who

³ Mark 10:35.

hare filled with a presumptuous sense of self esteem, men who have an imagined view of their own importance, men who are full of carnal pride.

And when they reach Jerusalem and when they go into the upper room that pride would still be with them in the upper room and not one of them would swallow his pride in order to do the task of a servant. And I am sure you all recall the scene. The upper room had been prepared for a Passover meal and the disciples had come into the upper room. They had all taken their place at the table. They are all reclining at the table and there is a very embarrassing silence.

The foot washing was something that was normally done by the household servants, but there was no household servant. And because of what has happened on the road and because there was this ill feeling between them, there is this silence and not one of them was going to take the first approach and wash the feet of the others.

And as they are lying there, there was no thought in their minds of what our Lord was thinking. There was no thought in their minds of what he was going to suffer. There was no thought in their minds of how they could minister to him. In that situation they all standing on their dignity, they all pretending not to notice that something needed to be done.

Not one of them would take the initiative. Not one of them would do the menial task of a servant because their hearts are filled with pride. And Peter is the spokesman for them all when our Lord eventually rises from the table, when he takes the towel, when he takes the basin, when he goes down on his knees and begins washing their feet with a note of shock astonishment. Peter says, "Dost thou wash my feet?"⁴

And he is, as it were, drawing his feet under the skirt of his garments and he is saying, "No, Lord, you are not going to do that to me."

If you will notice that our Lord deals with him very gently and very tenderly.

"Peter, don't be too proud to be ministered unto, not even by God."

That is the trouble, of course, with a lot of people in this world. They won't let other people minister unto them. And the sad thing is that some people won't let the Lord minister unto them. And that attitude which is found in Peter here is an attitude of an apparent humility. But what Peter was manifesting was an inverted form of pride. And all the disciples were in the room saying inwardly, knowing that a job had to be done, "Why should I do it? Let him do it. He want private place, let him do it."

And so we have a picture of weak, sinful me, not fully recognizing who they are and what they are in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ and filled with a false sense of their own importance. And that kind of spirit is the very antithesis of what the Christian gospel is all about. And it is for this reason that our Lord says to them what he does say.

⁴ John 13:6.

It shall not be so among you: but whoever will be great among you, let him be your minister. And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.⁵

And what our Lord is saying here is that the world has certain ideas of greatness and you are following the world's ideas of greatness. You know," he says, "that those who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, they exercise lordship over them. Their great ones exercise authority over them. They spend all their time, all their energies in the rat race to get to the top. And when they get to the top, they make everybody around them feel inferior. They throw their weight. They throw their authority at people. Those who are supposed to be the rulers of the Gentiles instead of being true leaders," he says, "They lord it over people. They are proud. They are disdainful. They are inhuman in their treatment of those who are around them. But," says our Lord, "it shall not be so among you."

In his kingdom true greatness is to be seen in the outpouring of yourself, in the service of others for the glory of God. It means taking the lowest place. It means being willing to do the most menial tasks. It means becoming a servant, a slave, a bond slave to other people for the glory of God.

"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."⁶

Here, then, is our Lord's own view and his own estimation of true greatness and what true greatness is all about. And that is the context in which these words are given.

Now there are three things that I want to consider with you in this 45th verse. And I want us to look, first of all, at what our Lord is saying about the greatness of who he himself was and then, secondly, to look at the greatness of what he actually did and then to look at the greatness of what he accomplished.

First of all, the greatness of who he was.

"Even the Son of man..."⁷

In the New Testament you will find that our Lord Jesus Christ is referred to in a variety of ways. Among other titles he is spoken of as Lord, as the master, as teacher or rabbi. There are various titles that are given to him. But when you read through the gospel narrative you will always find that his own personal favorite way of referring to himself was to take unto himself the title the Son of man. It is used over 80 times in the gospels. And it is most significant that our Lord took that title to himself. It seems that whenever

⁵ Matthew 20:26-28.

⁶ Mark 10:45.

⁷ Ibid.

he was thinking about himself, when our Lord had a self awareness, whenever he was self conscious, in his self consciousness he thinks of himself as the Son of man.

Now that is obviously a title which refers to his humiliation. It is demonstrating his oneness with us in our humanity.

“The Son of man,” he says, “hath not where to lay his head.”⁸

“The birds of the air have nests. The foxes have dens, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.”

“The Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”⁹

“The Son of man must suffer many things.”¹⁰

And he uses the title again and again to describe his humanity, his humiliation, his lowliness of heart, his lowliness of mind.

But there is, of course, another very significant aspect to this title. In the prophecy of Daniel in the seventh chapter Daniel is given the glorious vision of the future and in that vision Daniel sees one who is described as the Son of man. And to that being is given a kingdom which is world wide and everlasting.

“And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”¹¹

And it is a glorious feature of the Messiah, the anointed one in all his splendor and his majesty and glory ruling and reigning over his everlasting kingdom. And it was this very aspect of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ that the Jewish people could not understand. It was this aspect of our Lord’s character that enraged them. When he was brought before the council and when he was being questioned by the high priest, the high priest unto him, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”¹²

And Jesus answered, “I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”¹³

And it was at that point when he identified himself as the Son of man, that the high priest rent his clothes, recognizing that what our Lord was saying in his eyes was nothing other than blasphemy. And our Lord took that title and he used it to point out not just his

⁸ Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58.

⁹ Matthew 26:45; Mark 14:41.

¹⁰ Mark 8:31; Luke 8:22.

¹¹ Daniel 7:14.

¹² Mark 14:61.

¹³ Mark 14:62.

humanity and his humility, but he is pointing out his sovereignty and his glory that he is none other than the Son of man, that he is none other than the one who is preexistent with the ancient of days, the one who even now is seated on the right hand of the majesty on high. He is none other than the one who will return at the end of time in all his glory, his majesty and power. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the one who is and was and who is to come, even the Son of man.

Now, if you begin to understand what our Lord is saying to these disciples. Here they are frail, sinful creatures with dust who are seeking great things for themselves and he is saying to them, "This is what greatness is all about, even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, give his life a ransom for many."

And it is only as we grasp who Christ is, the greatness of who he is, that you can fully understand the greatness of what he did and what he accomplished. And it is very important for us to recognize, brethren, who Christ is.

In Daniel's vision he is revealed as the one who has an eternal equality with the ancient of days. He is the one who in the beginning was with God and was God. He is the one without any beginning, the one who exists from eternity. Before Bethlehem, Christ was. Before Creation, Christ existed. Before there was anything, he was there. And in that eternal state he enjoyed a glory with the Father and with the Holy Spirit in a perfect unity of love and harmony.

When all things in the beginning were created, he was there. And from the beginning of creation rich in all the love and adoration of all that he had created and made, he is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature, being the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person upholding all things by the word of his power, even the Son of man, the effulgence of the glory of God who bears the very stamp of the substance of God. And all that power and might and glory and majesty and splendor belongs to him by right.

And, says the apostle, he did not count it a thing to be grasped at, to hold on to greedily, something to cling to. He was willing to lay that aside. He, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation and took upon himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, even the Son of man.

So you begin to see something of the picture that our Lord is giving to these proud disciples, reminding us that pride is the most terrible thing in the followers of Christ. Pride is the reason that Satan was cast out of heaven. He was a creature that wanted to become the Creator.

"I will exalt myself. I will ascend to the heavens. I will exalt my throne. I will go higher to him. I will be as God."

That is how Adam was tempted at the fall. It was the sin of pride. It is that sin which is prevalent in us all.

We can be very, very proud even as the followers of Christ. We can be proud of ourselves and we can be proud of our looks and we can be proud of our dress. And those pastors among us pride can be a very, very real snare in our ministries. We can be proud of our ministries, proud of our preaching, proud of the church in which we minister, especially if we move from a smaller charge to a larger one, proud of the way we preach, evidenced by the fact that we feel so deflated if nobody passes any comment about it.

I was reading the comments of Robert Murray McCheyne, that godly man. And McCheyne recalls in his diary that he had preached on one occasion and he says this. "I fear that they love the messenger more than the message. And I am so vain as to love that love. They love the messenger more than the message and I am so vain as to love that love."

Pride can prepare the sermon and pride can go with you into the pulpit and pride can be with you when you are preaching and pride can go with you to the door.

A marvelous chapter in Baxter's *Reformed Pastor* on pride. If you read it, hopefully it will settle you for good.

And some people are proud of their families. Some of us never stop talking about them, especially if we are grandparents. Some of us we can be proud of our achievements, proud of our nationality. Nothing like the Americans, is there, apart from the British?

We sing land of hope and glory, mother of the free, how shall we extol thee who are born of thee? Wider still and wider may thy bounds [?], God who made they might, make thee mightier yet. And all our pride can well up within us that we are British.

We, sometimes like Peter and John we can be proud of our own spiritual capacities and abilities and capabilities.

"Can you drink of the cup that I drink of? And can you be baptized with the baptism that I am to be baptized with?"

And we think we can. A sense of their own spiritual capabilities. Can you do what I am going to do? Yes, we can.

And there is no spirit in man that is more opposed to almighty God than the spirit of pride.

Thomas Manton says that other sins are against God's law, but pride is against God's sovereignty. Pride is that sin which forbids people to acknowledge that they have any need of God and pride will exalt a man so that he struts across the face of the earth and he

thinks that he is the master of his own fate. He is the monarch of all he surveys. To his right, no one need dispute.

Pride is a sin that will make a man stand in the very temple of God like the Pharisee and say:

Oh, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.¹⁴

And it was all true.

But he spoils it with his insufferable pride.

And the publican who could not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me."¹⁵

Jesus said, "That man went down to his house justified," because one had God at the center of things and the other had himself at the center of things. He was filled with pride.

Now it is in the context of pride in those followers of his, that our Lord thinks these remarkable words.

"It shall not be like that among you. Pride must not have any place in your life. You are followers of me. And even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

Do you remember how John expresses it in that marvelous reading that we had from John 13?

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.¹⁶

Our Lord at that moment in the full consciousness of who he was, knowing that he had come from the Father, knowing the life that he had enjoyed with the Father, knowing that he had come from God, knowing that he was going back to the glory of the Father, knowing that he was going to the highest place that heaven affords, in the full awareness of where he had come from and where he was going to, in the awareness of who he was as the eternal Son of God, he took the towel and he washed their feet.

¹⁴ Luke 18:11-12.

¹⁵ Luke 18:13.

¹⁶ John 13:3-4.

That is a staggering thing to think about. He who was so high, even the Son of man became so low, born in an out house, marching toward Jerusalem to be delivered to the chief priests and the elders and the scribes, to suffer under Pontius Pilate, to be crucified, dead and buried, even the Son of man. Such is the greatness of who he was, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not created.

There he is, washing the feet of sinful, proud disciples with not a shred of pride in his [?].

Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled himself to wash the feet of a man like Judas Iscariot. That is why Isaac Watts can say:

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died.
My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God.

Even the Son of man, that is the greatness of who he was.

Now notice what he says about what he did, the greatness of what he did, “Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”¹⁷

Now it is when you bear in mind the greatness of who he was you can better understand the greatness of what he did. Now these are his words concerning himself.

“Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”¹⁸

He came into this world to seek and to save that which was lost. And that one word “came” describes the self emptying of the Son of man. Even the Son of man. That is what he was.

Then he says he came. That is what he became. And he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Equality with God was his by right. He does not hold it to himself, does not cling to it tightly, but he came freely and voluntarily into this world in order to redeem his people.

He did not for one moment divest himself of his deity. He never ceased for one moment to be God. But in that one word, “came” you have the message that he transfers the totality of his being into another realm. The whole Christ comes down and the whole Christ is conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. He, the Son of man was found in the darkness of the womb of a young woman for nine months. It is a staggering thought.

Even the Lord of glory wraps himself around in our human nature, wrapping himself around with our humanity, yet remaining at the same time God over all things and blessed forever so that in him you have the two distinct and separate natures, the godhead

¹⁷ Mark 10:45.

¹⁸ Ibid.

and the manhood inseparably joined in one person, truly and fully God, truly and fully man. That is the greatness of what he did.

So that there was an occasion when a stable in Bethlehem held something that was greater than this whole universe put together.

A W Tozer says that the awful majesty of the godhead was mercifully sheathed in the soft envelope of human nature in order to protect mankind.

And to the human mind there is something almost illogical in the assertion that God became man. It is like speaking about the square circle.

You cannot explain the mystery of the incarnation, the eternal God became man. Our God contracted to ascend, incomprehensibly made man. Now that is what Christ is saying happened.

Even the Son of man... That is what he was. He came into this world.

And you can take refuge from your bewilderment, not in explanation, but in adoration.

Who is he in yonder stall,
At whose feet the shepherds fall?
'Tis the Lord, oh wondrous story.
It is the Lord, the King of glory.

But you will notice that there is something else that our Lord says here.

“Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”¹⁹

He didn't simply take the form of a man. He takes upon himself the form of a servant. And in that upper room he was doing the work that was usually done by the slaves. Now he was, of course, God's obedient servant. He was the servant of the Lord, predicted and prophesied. He was the one who became obedient unto the law, the one who became obedient unto death. After his obedience to his father. And, again, the best commentary that you have, I suppose, is in John 13 in that upper room with all the tension, with all the concern, with all the disputes about greatness, with all this argument about privilege and pride of place, did you notice what John says in John 13?

Having loved his own which were in the world, he then went on to show them the full extent of his love.

When he took that basin and that towel, Johns says,. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love.” He loved them to the uttermost and he showed his love towards them.

¹⁹ Mark 10:45.

Why? Because, says John, they were his own.

“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.”²⁰

And he loved them as proud as they were and as sinful as they were and as weak and as fickle as they were. He loved them because they were his own.

Three weeks ago I took a journey from Glasgow 200 miles to visit somebody in the city of Liverpool. I went to visit a nursing home full of old people. I sat at the side of an elderly lady who could hardly talk to me. She wasn't able to feed herself. She wasn't able to dress herself or to tidy herself. I tried to talk to her. I tried to help her. I tried to comfort her. I helped her when she was walking with her [?], tried to clean her. She hardly knew that I was there. She hardly knew what I was doing. Anybody looking at me would hardly have given that lady another thought. And if they knew that I had traveled 200 miles that morning to visit her and that that afternoon I was traveling 200 miles back, they would have thought that I was mad.

And they were, might have said that they would not have done it for the simple reason that they didn't know who the lady was. I did. That lady was my mother. She was my own. She was the one who bore me. She is the one who nursed me. She was the one who cared for me from the age of five when my father deserted her and left her with three children and she had to labor for us and she had to work for us and sacrifice for us and love us. And she worked her fingers to the bone throughout the whole course of her life. And now she looks at me. She doesn't know me, but she is my mother. She is my own. Nobody else would do it for her, but I would do it every day of the week if I had to do it for the rest of my life because she is my own.

And Jesus looking at those disciples in the upper room, John tells us he having loved his own which were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love and he, the Son of man went down on his hands and knees and he was demonstrating the love that he had for his own. And he is washing their feet. Men, who were filled with pride, men who were jockeying for position. And he is going down in front of them and he is saying, as it were, “I will not only wash your feet. I will die for you.”

And they would all fall asleep in the garden and they would all forsake him and desert him, but they were his own. And he could beckon to the archangels and he could say to the archangel, “Do you see these? They are my own. My Father gave them to me. I have loved them with an everlasting love and I am going to lay down my life because they are my own.”

“Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”²¹

²⁰ John 13:1.

²¹ Mark 10:45.

In the full consciousness of who he was, where he came from and where he was going to, he ministered to them. And all the thoughts of Gethsemane and of the cross and of the tomb on his mind, Jesus ministered to them.

If ever a person could have been excused for being absorbed with his own thoughts, at that point it was our Savior. He had the weight of the world upon his shoulders. And yet he was thinking about them. And he demonstrates before them his servant heart.

That, my dear pastors, is what true greatness is all about.

Whoever will be great among you must be willing to be the servant. And he must be willing to be the servant of all. Whatever else you may say about our Lord Jesus Christ, you have to admit this. He always perfectly embodied his own teaching. And what he is saying to them he is demonstrating to them by taking the place of the slave and washing their feet.

And their pride has prevented them from doing it. And if he had asked for one of them to pass the cup, there would have been 12 willing volunteers. But they weren't willing to do the humble thing, the menial thing. And Peter had said to him, "Lord, I would lay down my life for you." But he wouldn't wash their feet for him.

And sometimes we oppose to be like that. We will sing and we will say, "I will go where you want me to go, dear Lord, I will do what you want me to do."

And he says, "I want you to do it for him or I want you to do it for her."

That is a different matter.

Well, you see, I don't really get on with them. I can't relate to their personality. I find it hard to love them. I don't like the way they speak or the way they dress or the way they behave.

That kind of talk is totally irrelevant in the Christian life.

Ezekiel 16. Do you remember that marvelous picture that the Lord gives of his people?

"When you were born," he says, "You were like that child, that foundling child. The navel had only just been cut, wasn't even washed from the blood of its birth and it was cast into the hedgerow. And when people passed by," said the Lord, "when people passed by you, nobody pitied you. Nobody would do anything for you. Ah," but he says, "When I passed by you and I saw you in your blood my eye pitied you. I took you and I lifted you and I washed you and I clothed you and I made you comely with the garments that I had put upon you when there was nothing lovely in you. I did all this for you."

And Christ comes to his people. There is nothing lovely in us. There is nothing to commend ourselves. Even the Son of man, when we were like that, the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for us.

That is the greatness of what he did. And then the verse tells us something of the greatness of what he accomplished.

“Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.”²²

Now, of course, that word ransom is the key to the understanding of what our Lord’s death is all about. It is the very heart of the Christian message. What does it mean to be a Christian?

Does it simply mean following the example of Christ? Does it mean that you try to live by the teachings of Christ and by the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount? Does it mean that you are a Christian because you have been baptized either as an infant or as an adult and that you have your name on a church roll? Or is there something more to being a Christian? And this statement of our Lord is vital to the understanding of what true Christianity is all about.

He says, “The Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many.” And a ransom is the price that is paid to redeem something or to redeem someone.

I remember my dear mother when I was just a boy. On a Monday she would have to go up the back entry in Liverpool to pawn a number of articles at the pawn shop so that she would have money for the rest of the week. And then at the end of the week when she had a bit of money, she would run along the back entry and the back alley to the pawn shop. Nobody could see her, in order that she might redeem her pledge, so that she could have it back. Sometimes it would be Sunday clothes.

And what she was doing was redeeming her possession. She was getting her possession back. Her ransom is the money that you pay to receive a possession back. And here is our Lord speaking about his own life being given as the ransom price. You pay a ransom to secure the release of a kidnap victim and here is our Lord. He is speaking about his own death. What is his death on the cross about? What is the true meaning of this Christianity? Why did Christ die?

Well, he says, “the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life as a ransom for many.”²³

And that word ransom, of course, would have many connotations for his followers. They would know from their own history, they would know from the exodus in Egypt how that was regarded again and again as a redemption. God says, “I redeemed you from they

²² Mark 10:45.

²³ Ibid.

hand of the enemy,” when they had gone into captivity in Babylon. And the Lord turned again that captivity and they were like those that dreamed. God speaking afterwards says, “I redeemed you.”

Redemption was there in the thought of buying back individuals who had been, because of poverty, sold into slavery. They could be bought back under certain conditions.

Boaz in the book of Ruth was a kinsman redeemer so that the ransom is that price which is paid for redeeming something. And here our Lord says that his death, by his death, he was doing something. He was redeeming. He was ransoming his people from their sins.

And so Paul writes to the Ephesians and says, “In him we have redemption through his blood who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.”

You have been redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, reminding us that we were in bondage as we are born into this world. WE are the slaves of sin.

But now in Christ something has happened. The Son of man has come in order to give his life a ransom for many. He came into this world to redeem his people. He is the only Redeemer of his own elect.

And what he did he did freely and he did fully. And he did not simply come into this world to make people savable. He came to save his people from their sins. When he cried on the cross, “τετελεισται” (tel-tel’-es-tai), “It is finished,”²⁴ what he did he did voluntarily.

“No man taketh my life from me. I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down. I have power to take it up again.”

It was a voluntary death. It was a vicarious death. He died in the place of his people. He became the substitute of his people. He died the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God.

“God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.”

And it is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement that our Lord is emphasizing here, a doctrine that is denigrated and discarded and derided in the day and age in which we live.

And, my dear brethren, a doctrine which is neglected among evangelicals and reformed evangelicals.

²⁴ John 19:30.

I had an occasion a few years ago to be out of the pulpit for some time and to worship in different places of worship. It astonished me. It rebuked me and challenged me concerning my own ministry, how little I heard the death of Christ preached on in reformed circles.

Paul writes to the Galatians and he reminds them, “Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you.”²⁵

And we believe that the death of Christ is the heart of the Christian gospel. Then we must preach it.

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned he stood.
Sealed my pardon with his blood,
Hallelujah, what a Savior.

He came into this world to give his life as a ransom for many.

Well, I want to try and illustrate that for you as I close, perhaps in a more personal way.

If you read the account of our Lord’s trials and of his death, you will find that again and again he was declared to be innocent. It was, of course, absolutely impossible for him to be brought before any court of law to be found guilty of the least sin. He was not guilty and he could never be guilty of sin. But you will notice in the gospel narratives that he is repeatedly declared innocent.

Pilate says, “I find no fault in this man.”²⁶

When he came before Herod no mention is made that Herod brought any charge against him.

Pilate then says, “I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.”²⁷

And then we are told Pilate willing to release Jesus spoke unto him. And then we are told he said to him the third time, “Why, what even hath he done?” I have found no cause of death in him.”²⁸

Then, you remember, the dying thief. We are told that when the dying thief recognized

²⁵ Galatians 3:1.

²⁶ Luke 23:4.

²⁷ Luke 23:14-15.

²⁸ Luke 23:22.

who Christ was he said, “We receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.”²⁹

And then we are told that the Roman Centurion looking at our Lord dying said, “Certainly, this was a righteous man.”³⁰

And it will be difficult to find any more conclusive evidence from different people concerning the innocence of our Lord Jesus Christ. In any court of law in almost any country in the world, the charges would have been dropped in the light of those statements.

Yet having declared his innocence, we are then shown that Christ was treated as if he was guilty because we read that having declared his innocence Pilate said, “I will chastise him and then release him. I have found no cause of death in him. I will chastise him and let him go.”

He delivered Jesus unto their will.

Repeatedly he is declared innocent, but he is treated as if he is guilty. It was the gravest miscarriage of justice. There would be an outcry in every court in the land if those statement were made tomorrow. If any man was brought before any court in this land and was told by the magistrate on the bench, “I find that you are innocent. I am putting you away for 20 years,” it would be an outrage.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was innocent and he was treated as if he was guilty. Why? Because God was at work in it all. Why was there a trial? Because God was at work in it all. Why did our Lord Jesus Christ not speak up and defend himself? Why did he not say that he was innocent? Because you can come to no other conclusion than he chose to be found guilty.

But, my dear people, there was someone else in the narrative. Christ the innocent one is dealt with as if he was guilty. There was another man whose name was Barabbas. And you will discover that Barabbas is declared on the page of Scripture as being a man who was guilty. He has already been tried and found guilty of sedition and of murder. There was no doubt about Barabbas’ guilt. There is no question raised about the crimes of Barabbas. There is no question raised, there is no objection either from Barabbas or from anybody else concerning the sentence that Barabbas had received. He was a rebel. He was a murderer. He was guilty beyond any shadow of a doubt. If it had not been for the fact that our Lord had been arrested and brought to trial at that particular time, then Barabbas would have been put to death and that would have been the end of it. We would never have heard about Barabbas again.

But he is mentioned in the narrative because of the circumstances that took place in his life. He is a rebel, a murderer, tried, found guilty. Suddenly he finds that he is treated as

²⁹ Luke 23:41.

³⁰ Luke 23:47.

if he is innocent. And Barabbas is released and Barabbas is set free. And these are the two people that we have presented before us in the narrative concerning the trial of Christ.

On the one hand the Son of man, the prince of life, the eternal Son of God, holy, harmless and undefiled. On the other hand, a violent murderer, a rebel and a criminal. And yet, you see, there is a very real sense in which Barabbas doesn't stand before us as an isolated individual. There is a real sense in which Barabbas stands before us as a representative figure. He represents every one of us. That is our picture as we are before God. Everyone of us as we have been born into this world, we are guilty. We are guilty of sedition. We are guilty of rebellion. We will not have God to rule over us. That is our standing and our position. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We are under the curse of the law of God. And that is a basic and ultimate human problem from which every other problem stems. It has to do with our standing before God and that, deep down, is every man's tremendous question. Whether you realize it or not this evening, the greatest question in your life is your standing before God.

If you are a sinner it is to be under condemnation just as Barabbas was under condemnation.

“He that believeth is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already,”³¹ says our Lord. He is condemned already. Notice the word already. Notice the word “already.” That means that there are an awful lot of condemned people walking around in this world. They don't have to wait until they die until they are condemned. They are condemned already. And they are condemned because they have not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. By virtue of the fact that they do not believe, they are condemned. Unbelief is not some unfortunate defect that we are born with. Unbelief is to be without God and without Christ and without hope either for this world or for the next because we have rebelled against God.

But then you will notice what happened as far as Barabbas was concerned. Against all his hopes, without any prompting on his part, on the sole initiative of almighty God a word of hope is brought to bear. Maybe from the confines of his prison cell he could hear the voice of Pilate saying, “Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas or Jesus which is called the Christ?”³²

And here is Barabbas listening to his name and it is all now a matter of Jesus or Barabbas. The lot must fall one or the other. One will be released and the other will be crucified. If Jesus is freed, Barabbas is lost. If Jesus is crucified, Barabbas will be saved.

Now remember that we are thinking Barabbas as a representative figure. And as Barabbas stand in relation to Jesus, so you stand. With respect to you it can be said which shall die, the sinner or the sinless one?

³¹ John 3:18.

³² Matthew 27:17.

And I am here to tell you this evening that your sins are either on your own head or they are on the head of Christ. And the curse which we have inflicted, that we have accrued must be inflicted. The justice of God demands that the sentence is to be carried out. And that is a mighty issue for every one of us fallen guilty sinners.

On one side the sinless Son of God and only Christ can appease the wrath of God and only Christ can make atonement for sin. And I read in my Bible that Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified. And behind the activity of Pilate I see the overruling sovereignty of almighty God because salvation is his initiative.

“The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”³³

Romans 8:32, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him...”³⁴ The very same words. “Delivered him up for us all.” Pilate delivered him, but behind the acts of Pilate God was delivering him. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

And you see what happened. Our Lord and Barabbas, they changed places. And the bonds and the curse and the disgrace and the sufferings and the punishment that was due to the murderer and to the rebel, they come upon the head of the innocent Christ. And Barabbas is given a standing and a freedom and a safety and a well being that he never deserved.

That, my dear people, is what it means to be redeemed and to be ransomed. He made him to be sin who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God. And if we were left to ourselves we would be eternally lost.

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”³⁵

Can I ask you to imagine as I apply this in closing, can you imagine Barabbas in his prison cell? A messenger comes to him with the glorious news. “Barabbas, Barabbas, you are free. Your life has been spared. The death sentence has been removed. It has been removed forever. You no longer have to stand before the courts of justice. No further accusation will be given against you. You are restored to all your rights of freedom and of citizenship. You will never be treated as if you have committed a crime again, because, Barabbas, a sinless substitute has taken your place.”

How does Barabbas react? Does he react as many people react and maybe you have been reacting to the news of the gospel? Did Barabbas say, “Oh, I am sorry. You have got it wrong. You can’t mean me. Not the kind of man I am. I am a murderer. I am guilty of sedition. I have been condemned and rightly. But you have got it wrong”?

³³ Isaiah 53:6.

³⁴ Romans 8:32.

³⁵ Mark 10:45.

Suppose they went to take his chains off him and he resisted the moves to release him. You would say that that man was absolutely senseless. But that is exactly how people react to the news of the gospel. They feel that they are too far gone. Too bad, Jesus, you don't know the kind of life that I have lived. And they resist and they refuse the free offer of Christ in the gospel. It is the height of folly.

Is that you this evening? Or suppose Barabbas had said to the messenger, "Well, it sound good, but it sound too good to be true. It can't be true. You are telling me something that couldn't possibly have taken place. It hasn't happened. I can't believe that what you are saying is right."

Now if Barabbas had said that, Barabbas would have done two things. He would have, first of all insulted the messenger and he would also have insulted the authorities that sent him. And those people who refuse the gospel on the basis that they say, "Well, it is just too good to be true that what you are saying sound good. It sounds very nice. But I just can't accept it."

What you are doing is that you are insulting almighty God. Our Lord has said, "Whosoever believes on him shall not perish. They shall have everlasting life," whoever believes on him.

And you are saying, "Oh, no, it is just too good to be true."

Or suppose Barabbas—and maybe I coming a little bit nearer the bone to some of you—suppose Barabbas had said, "Well, I will just stay here in prison until a more suitable time, until a time that is more suitable to me."

Absurd. You may have been challenged by the gospel from this pulpit again and again and you go out of those doors another day, another time. It is the most ridiculous thing to do. Now is the acceptable time. Today is the day of salvation.

Or maybe Barabbas could have said, "Well, what you say is wonderful. It is good news, but really in order to receive this, I have really got to prove myself to show that I really do deserve my freedom. So let me do a few more years in prison. I will clean up the prison cell and I will show my gratitude that way and then after a couple of years I will receive the pardon that you are giving to me."

If Barabbas had said that, those messengers would have said to him, "Do you think that you are being released on the basis of what you have done or can do or will do? You are not being released on anything that you are. You are not being released on anything that you can do. You are being released because of what someone else has done."

Could your tears forever flow,
Could your zeal no respite know,

All for sin could not atone.
Christ must save and Christ alone.

Probably what did happen was this, that Barabbas got out of those chains as quickly as he could and got out of his prison clothes as quickly as he could and went back to his wife and to his family.

And is it fanciful for me to imagine that Barabbas made his way to a place called Calvary? Is it fanciful for me to imagine that Barabbas was in the crowd when he heard him cry, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do"? Is it fanciful for me to imagine that Barabbas is saying, "In my place condemned he stood. He sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah, what a Savior"?

And many of us have been in that place. And we have seen Christ as our Savior standing in our place. He loved me. He gave himself for me, even the Son of man who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.

You know him. You belong to him. Come to him. This may be the last opportunity that you will have. This may be the last sermon I will preach. I urge you to come to Christ.

Even the Son of man....

Let us bow together in prayer.

Oh Lord our God and our gracious heavenly Father, how we thank thee that we can say, "Great is the gospel of our glorious God where mercy met the anger of God's wrath. The penalty was paid and pardon bough and sinners at last to thee were brought." Oh, let the praises of my heart be thine. For Christ has died that I may call him mine, that I may dwell with those who dwell above adoring, praising Jesus, the King of love. Hear our prayers. Bless thy Word to all of our hearts for Christ our Savior's sake. Amen.