

Christ Jesus Gave Himself as a Ransom: 1 Timothy 2:5-6
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On Sunday morning I'm going to preach on 1 Timothy 2:1-7. What I want to do this evening is examine just a small portion of that text as we focus on Christ's death for sinners.

As we consider Jesus' death this evening, I just want to comment briefly on three aspects of Christ's work which are mentioned in these two verses. First, Christ is our mediator (verse 5). Second, He gave himself up (verse 6), referring to His sacrificial death on the cross. And thirdly, He is our ransom (also in verse 6), which shows that His sacrificial death was substitutionary. He became our substitute. He died so that we can be freed.

Christ the Mediator

First, we see in verse 5 that Paul makes a clear monotheistic statement. There is one God. But he doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that there's only one way to get to this one God. There is only one mediator between God and men. There's only one go-between. There's only one person who can bring reconciliation between a holy God and sinful humanity. And this one mediator is "the man Christ Jesus." Christ Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity. He is fully God. And He is also fully human, as Paul emphasizes here. He is the man Christ Jesus. This is the beauty and wonder of who Christ is. And we see here the connection between the person of Christ and the work of Christ, because He has to be fully God and fully man in order to be the mediator between God and men. He has to be fully God in order to bear the infinite penalty for sin, and He has to be fully human in order to bear that penalty in our place, as our substitute. So marvel at the person and work of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. There is no one else like Him, and therefore there is no other way to be saved. Jesus, Himself, said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). There is only one way to God, and that is through the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Christ's Sacrifice

The second thing that these verses point to is Christ's sacrifice. The words at the beginning of verse 6 highlight this, "who gave himself." This is how Christ Jesus serves as the mediator between God and men. He gave himself, meaning He allowed himself to be sacrificed. Listen to how Jesus said this of Himself. In John 10:11 He says, "I am the good shepherd. The

good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” And later in that passage, in verse 18 He says, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” Jesus did this willingly. He endured the excruciating pain and agony of the cross, giving himself as a sacrifice. He also says in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus gave Himself up to death, even death on a cross, in order to pay the penalty for our sin. These statements of Jesus also take us back to the prophecy of Isaiah 53, that this Suffering Servant would one day come to pour “out his soul to death” (Isaiah 53:12).

These are truths that we affirm and believe, and yet I wonder how often we contemplate the depth of what this means—the intensity of the physical agony as well as the relational and emotional agony of bearing His Father’s wrath against sin. To meditate, first of all, on the physical agony of crucifixion, let me read you a few things from William Lane’s commentary on the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 15:24 it says, “And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take.” There’s very little comment on the crucifixion itself. William Lane writes, “The fact of Jesus’ crucifixion is recorded with utmost restraint. The details were too familiar in the Roman world to require extended comment.” But for us, crucifixion is not familiar, and thus we’re in danger of minimizing the gruesomeness of this event. Lane goes on, “Normally, the delinquent was stripped, and after having been scourged, his outstretched arms were nailed or tied with cords to the cross-beam . . . The cross-piece was then lifted up with the body on it and fastened to an upright stake already sunk into the earth to which the feet were now nailed . . . Crucifixion was essentially death by exhaustion. The time required for death naturally depended on the physical condition of the victim as well as on the manner by which the body was affixed to the cross. When nails were used physical torment was heightened, but ordinarily it was less protracted because death was hastened by the loss of blood” (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 564-66).

Wayne Grudem also summarizes the agony of crucifixion. He writes, “A criminal who was crucified was essentially forced to inflict upon himself a very slow death by suffocation. When the criminal’s arms were outstretched and fastened by nails to the cross, he had to support most of the weight of his body with his arms. The chest cavity would be pulled upward and outward, making it difficult to exhale in order to be able to draw a fresh breath. But when the victim’s longing for oxygen became unbearable, he would have to push himself up with his feet, thus giving more natural support to the weight of his body, releasing

some of the weight from his arms, and enabling his chest cavity to contract more normally. By pushing himself upward in this way the criminal could fend off suffocation, but it was extremely painful because it required putting the body's weight on the nails holding the feet, and bending the elbows and pulling upward on the nails driven through the wrists. The criminal's back, which had been torn open repeatedly by a previous flogging, would scrape against the wooden cross with each breath" (*Systematic Theology*, 572). This is what Jesus gave Himself up to. He gave Himself up to death, and not just any death. He didn't receive a lethal injection and then slip off quietly and painlessly. He was tortured, having his back cut open by the whips, his hands and feet nailed to the cross, and dying from exhaustion and suffocation.

But the physical agony was not even the extent of His suffering. An even deeper and more painful aspect of His death was the pain of bearing sin, for this entailed being forsaken by His Father and becoming the object of His Father's wrath. Remember what He cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). This was utterly painful for each of them. The Father had to punish His perfect and beloved Son, and the Son had to, for the first and only time, be rejected and punished by His Father. This relational agony of being forsaken by His Father and the psychological agony of bearing our sin was far more excruciating even than the physical torture of crucifixion. And all of this is what happened in Jesus' death. This is what He gave Himself up to.

Christ Our Ransom

Finally, we consider Christ our ransom. 1 Timothy 2:6 says, "who gave himself up as a ransom for all." On Sunday I'll talk about the meaning of "all" in this passage. But this evening let's think about the fact that Christ Jesus is our ransom. We've seen that He is the one mediator between God and men, and that He gave himself up, referring to His sacrificial death. The addition of this word "ransom" emphasizes the fact that Christ's sacrificial death was substitutionary. He allowed Himself to be sacrificed so that we can be set free. This word speaks of the price paid to free captives. John Stott says, "The word implies that we were in bondage to sin and judgment, unable to save ourselves, and that the price paid for our deliverance was the death of Christ in our place" (*Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, 70). This creates a vivid picture for us of what Jesus' sacrificial death accomplished. He gave Himself as a ransom. He gave His life as the necessary payment for our release. In order for us to escape the punishment of sin, He gave His own life as our ransom.

An important question arises at this point, which is “to whom is this ransom paid?” We need to raise this question because Origen, who lived from 185 – 254 A. D., held a theory of the atonement which said that the ransom was paid to Satan. The reasoning was that we are sinners and therefore in the bondage of Satan’s kingdom. And therefore the ransom of Christ’s death is paid to Satan for our release. But this wrongly elevates the power of Satan, and it misses a crucial aspect of the atonement. The ransom is not paid to Satan, but to God. It is God who requires a payment for sin. He is the One who upholds justice and therefore must punish sin, and so it’s His justice which must be satisfied in some way if sinners are to be forgiven. Christ’s death did just that. He gave Himself as a ransom, and thus paid the penalty of sin on our behalf. Romans 3:24-25 speak of “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Propitiation refers to satisfying God’s wrath against sin, and Jesus is the One who did this. He bore God’s infinite and fierce punishment for sin, and thus redeemed us. He set us free.

This gives us an important insight into the nature of God and the relationship between the Father and the Son. Many people would like to avoid any idea of God being angry or wrathful. And it is especially offensive to some to think of God the Father punishing His own Son. But these biblical truths are at the heart of the Gospel. We have to come to terms with the fact that God hates sin and must punish sin. And we have to recognize that we are, indeed, sinners who deserve God’s eternal punishment. And then we can rejoice in the redemption we have in Christ. He was punished so that we don’t have to be punished. He died on the cross so that we don’t have to go to hell. He gave Himself as a ransom, satisfying God’s wrath against our sin so that we can be free.

So on this Good Friday let us meditate on the person and work of Christ Jesus. He is the God-Man and therefore the only One who can be a mediator between God and men. He gave Himself to be tortured and killed by crucifixion. And His death served as a ransom as He became our substitute.