

The Acropolis of the Christian Faith
(First Baptist Church Powell)

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Bible Text: Romans 3:23-27; Proverbs 17:15

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Let's open up our Bibles to the book of Romans chapter three. And let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, I come before you in the name of your Son and, Lord, I know that apart from him I would have no part with you, no virtue, no merit, nothing even in all these years of walking with you. I remain with Christ alone.

Father, we are such a needy people and we are so dull of ear and blind of eye. We are so weak in ourselves. We need the, oh God. And we need your help. Lord, it is a great task and even all our plans and strategies are... are rot apart from your Word and your power. Help us tonight and we will know that we have been helped. Strengthen us and we will know that we have been strengthened. We look to you with great confidence because of him.

And, Father, we have no handle on you to say, "Do this thing for the nations," for what are the nations before you, but a drop in a bucket, or to do this thing for us. Who are we?

But, Father, we would ask that you would look in the face of your dear Son and do it for him. Do it for him. Lord, the needs are many and the preacher is very small. You know, oh Lord, you know. In Jesus' name. Amen.

In Romans chapter three and verse 23.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.¹

¹ Romans 3:23-27

If I had to lose every bit of Scripture and was allowed to remain with me, to keep with me, only one passage from all the words that have ever been written through inspired men, I would choose this passage. Down through the history great theologians and preachers have called this the acropolis of the Christian faith. It is the essential element of the gospel. And apart from it you cannot preach correctly the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now you say, “Well, brother Paul, this is a missions. This is about missions.”

We need to understand a few things. Missions is not about sending missionaries and missions is not about doing missions. Missions is about the communication of truth to men. And you can send out all the missionaries in the world, but if they are not communicating truth it is rot and it is flesh.

Another thing that we need to understand is that we live in a day when the gospel is not very clear. A great sin of our age is what I would call gospel reductionism. We have taken the glorious gospel of our blessed God and turned it into four spiritual laws or five things God wants you to know and if someone will say yes to all our little evangelical questions, we will popishly declare them saved if they will repeat a prayer after us.

We hear countless stories of evangelists going abroad and teaching to tens of thousands of people and all of them being converted. And yet with the missionary goes to look for them, he can't find a single one on Sunday. We have an age of superficiality, an age of making a lot of noise. But what is being accomplished?

I would submit to you that our greatest need is to rediscover the gospel of Jesus Christ and to proclaim it. I have always said this, especially to the young missionaries that I have dealt with. Give me one man, simple enough, to walk into the middle of the town square with an open Bible and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ until someone comes out of there converted or he comes out laying on a stretcher.

We need preachers. We need men who believe that this task and women who believe that this task is so great that not all the strategies in the world can make one soul converted. There is a power of God for salvation. And it is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so I would like to take this time to review this gospel.

You say, “But, brother Paul, we understand it.”

Listen to me. There is much to do today about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the correct interpretation of the book of Revelation. I can assure you that you will understand everything about the book of Revelation and everything about the Second Coming on the day it occurs. But I can also assure you this. That you will spend an eternity of eternities and you will still not be comprehend the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not Christianity 101 and now that we have got that out of the way after five minutes of counseling, let's go on to greater things.

There is nothing greater in the Christian life than the gospel. There will never be anything greater than the gospel. And there is no power to save outside of a clear proclamation of the gospel.

Now this is for the lost man and the one who has not heard, but don't think it stops there. The greatest motivation, the only true motivation in the Christian life is what God has done for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I was listening to all the testimonies and hearing the singing and I was so elated. I just wanted to buy a plane ticket and go somewhere and preach the gospel where it hasn't been preached. But I have found that even the fire that is built up through missions conferences quickly dies down. There has to be a stronger medicine, something that will keep a man on the field, something that will make a woman stay when everything in them is screaming. It takes more than a conference. It takes the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.²

Every thing that we are and every thing that we do is to be motivated by this one thing. He shed his own blood for my soul.

The Christian lives between two days: the day when Christ the Messiah hung before men and the day when all men will kneel before Christ. That is some motivation.

Now, let's look at this little gospel of ours and see if we understand it as much as we think we do.

First of all let's look at the text that we learned, probably the first verse that we ever learned, possibly in Scripture. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."³

You know, when you hear something over and over it becomes common and when it becomes common it loses its power. I remember the first time crossing the Andes Mountains and I couldn't understand why the veteran missionary was asleep in the midst of all this majestic beauty. And then years later as I took a group of young men across the same mountain I found myself snoring.

There is a sense in which the more you hear something and the more you read something it loses some of its majesty. It is not the fault of the text. The fault is our own, but it happens nonetheless.

"All have sinned."⁴

One of the greatest problems with gospel preaching today is we are not wounding men. We are not wounding men.

² See 2 Corinthians 4:6

³ Romans 3:23

⁴ Ibid.

Why do men not seek a Savior? Because for the most part in much preaching men are pretty much ok. They just need to be tweaked here and there. They have got everything they need. They just need one thing to make their perfect life a little more perfect and that is Jesus on top and they don't understand that all men are born in sin, wretched and defiled and God hating with a dark and dead heart.

There is no man who seeks him.

When we go to preach the gospel in the mission field we must realize that our job is an absolute catastrophe and will be in failure upon failure apart from the power of God resurrecting dead men, not only dead men, but dead men who with whatever power is in them, whatever animation, hate God. We must in our preaching convince men, work to tell men, use the Scriptures with all our might to scream out, "All have sinned."⁵

If I jangled some keys here tonight it would not fill your heart with joy and do you want to know why? Because you are not locked away in a dungeon somewhere. If you were locked away in a dungeon then the sound of keys would cause joy to spring up in your heart.

Much of gospel preaching today has so little power. It is not very difficult to get men saved. The problem is getting them lost.

"All have sinned."⁶

I know we do not understand that text because if you truly understood it as a Christian you would jump right now out of your seat, fall on the ground and worship with joy that you have been saved from such a heinous thing. And if you are lost here tonight I know you do not understand the passage because you would tremble with fear to the point of death.

"All have sinned."⁷

A lot of popular preachers are gaining a lot of popularity today because they make it their purpose not to speak about sin. But they go against the work of our Lord who in preaching preached sin. They go against the work of the apostles who worked with all their intellectual might, moved by the Holy Spirit to reveal the sin of men. And most of all, I can assure you, that a preacher or a missionary that does not make much of sin does not have the work of the Holy Spirit in their life because it is one of the great tasks of the Holy Spirit to convict men of sin. And when you don't believe that you are working against the Holy Spirit.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

If we look in the book of Romans just here we see the apostle Paul laying out for us the closest thing we get to a systematic theology and yet he takes his first three chapters and he works with all his might to do one thing, to shut men off from every fleshly hope, to close them in, to lock the doors, to provide them nothing of relief in the flesh so that they will cry out to God and mercy.

“All have sinned.”⁸

Think about that for a moment. Do you know why the people do not tremble about sin? Because they don't understand God, because the God in America today looks more like Santa Claus than he doe Yahweh of the Bible.

“All have sinned.”⁹

It is as if on the day of creation God stands there and he commands the stars to put themselves in space and they all bow and worship and obey him. He tells planets to set themselves in orbit and to move at his decree and they all bow and obey him. He tells mountains to be lifted up and valleys to be cast down and they all obey him. And then he looks at the brave sea and he says, “You will come to this point and you will come no further,” and the sea bows and worships. And then he looks at man and he says, “Come,”

And man goes, “No!”

The heinous nature of sin, the revelation of that truth is the work of the Holy Spirit and as ministers of the gospel we are to be kind, we are to be loving, we are to be gentle, but we are to make much of sin.

“All have sinned.”¹⁰

How much sin work do you do when you are witnessing? How much do you lay out the Scriptures before men? How much convincing do you do?

I know the popular thing. Do you... the question is: Do you realize you are a sinner?

If a person says, “Yes,” we go on to the next question.

If a person says, “Yes, I know I am a sinner,” it means absolutely nothing.

The question is not: Do you recognize you are a sinner. The devil recognizes he is a sinner. He is a mighty fine one at that. The question is not: Do you recognize you are a sinner. The question is: Upon hearing the preaching of the gospel, has God so moved in your heart that the sin you once loved you now hate, that the sin you once boasted of, you

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

are now ashamed, that the sin you once clinging to, you now desire with all your might to be separated from it, to be redeemed from it.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹¹

Modern day interpretations go something like this. It is all about man.

“God has a wonderful purpose for your life, but you didn’t reach that glorious wonderful purpose.”

That is really not the emphasis here in this text. You have to look at this text in its context which is Romans one.

When it means all have fallen short of glory of God it means although they knew God, they did not honor him as God, nor give thanks.¹²

Man’s greatest problem today is he is all about himself. He has an infinite hole in that heart of his and it cannot be filled up with all of his own self or all of the world. It requires infinite and that is God.

I will give you an example. Just look at our Christian bookstores today. We are the most wealthy, most protected, most safe Christians who ever walked upon the face of the earth and yet you go into these Christian bookstores and 75% of the books deal with how empty we are.

Why are we so empty? For the same reason Jesus Christ never was. He said, “I have food to eat that you know not of. My food is to do the will of him who sent me.”¹³

All about self. Men are full of self. Men do not need more self esteem. They need to realize that that is their greatest problem. And what they need is to esteem the only one who is worthy of esteem and that is God, to lose themselves in him. But in order to preach this way, in order to have a gospel this way men must know who God is.

If I were to give a conference on how to get a good life in this age, if I were to give a conference on how to balance your check book in the name of Jesus I could fill up an auditorium. But what if I gave a conference on simply the attributes of God?

Do you realize that Sunday morning is one of the greatest hours of idolatry in America because the people worship what they do they not know. If I were to pass out even here right now a piece of paper saying, “Write out for me, just classical, historical Christianity, a description of the attributes of God along with a few texts,” do you realize that so many people today worship a God that is no God at all, even in our churches. They worship a God they have made with their own mind and they worship what they have made.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Romans 1:21

¹³ See John 4:32, 34

One of the greatest needs in our evangelism is to teach men who God is. The gospel begins not with man, but it begins with who God truly is. Because therein lies a problem. If God was not who God is, then sin would not be the problem that it is.

But sin is the problem that it is because God happens to be not only love, but holy and just.

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹⁴

Another thing that is very important to understand is that sin has consequences and they are natural. Death is not a natural consequence of sin. It is a supernatural consequence of sin. It is the judgment of God.

There is a thing called wrath. There is a thing called justice. There is a thing called holiness. There is a sense in which God will judge every man according to his deeds. There is a sense that God will pronounce judgment upon all men. And many men will be placed in hell by the very Word of God. God will make the decree. Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?¹⁵

Man has sinned. Man is at odds with God and God is at odds with men. And if you don't believe that, you don't believe historical Christianity.

But then he goes, verse 24, speaking about the Christian, “Being justified, being justified...”¹⁶

Being justified does not mean just as if I had never sinned. It rhymes, but it just doesn't mean that. Being justified does not mean that the moment a person places saving faith in Jesus Christ they are made righteous before him, because if that were the case they would be absolutely perfect never to sin again. But to be justified before God is a forensic or legal declaration that God declares that person to be right with him.

Now, how does that happen? He says as a gift by his grace. He is being redundant here it seems, but with great purpose.

It is almost as if he is saying, “Being justified or declared right with God by a gift, as a gift, as a gift, as a gift,” that it is a gift and nothing but a gift.

Now let's look at two things here that are very important.

First of all a study of religions of our day. There is, in a sense, it is a very, very valuable thing to do. There is a sense in which there are only two religions, the religion of grace and a religion of works. Anyone who clings to a religion of works does not understand

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See Genesis 18:25

¹⁶ Romans 3:24

two basic things: how holy and just God is and how sinfully wicked they are. They are blind to those two realities.

But I want us to look at something for a moment. Let's just think about this.

“Justified as a gift.”¹⁷

This same word is used when it said they hated him with a cause.¹⁸

Did anyone ever have a cause for hating the Messiah? Did anyone ever have a cause for hating Christ? Could anyone ever point to Jesus and say, “You have done this and that and therefore I have just cause for hating you”? No! Christ never sinned against God or man.

But it says that they hated him without a cause. And in the same way here in this text he is saying he justified them without a cause.

They did not give him a cause to justify them.

It is like when Israel, basically, the question is asked: God, why have you chosen Israel in Deuteronomy? Why have you set your love upon Israel? And the answer is a taunt. He says, “I have loved you because I loved you.”¹⁹

And what he is basically saying is, “Israel, the only reason I love you is because I have chosen to love you. It has absolutely nothing to do with your virtue or merit. It is all because of me.”

If you are justified it has absolutely nothing to do with any virtue or merit in your life. It has all to do with who God is and the saving power of the gospel.

When we look at religions we can see this. You speak to a... let's just put before us today an interview with an Orthodox Jew, Muslim and a true Christian. I have to say true Christian because, of course, in America everyone is Christian. That is why it is so hard to evangelize the Muslims.

But you ask the Orthodox Jew, “If you died right now where would you go?”

He may say, “Paradise or the way of the righteous, Abraham's bosom.”

“Why?”

“I love the law of God. I honor the law of God. The law of God has a central place in my home. I am a righteous man.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See John 15:25

¹⁹ See Deuteronomy 7:7-8

And the reporter says, “Well, ok, I understand that.”

And the reporter goes to the Muslim. “If you died right now where would you go?”

“I would go to paradise.”

“Why?”

“I love the Koran. I have made the pilgrimages, the daily prayers, the giving of alms. I am a righteous man.”

Ok. Come to the Christian. “Sir, if you died right now, where would you go?”

“To heaven.”

“Why?”

“In sin I was conceived and in sin did my mother bring me forth. I have broken every law that God has ever given. I deserve the...”

And the reporter stops him and says, “Sir, you are a paradox to me. I don’t understand. These other two gentlemen I quite understand. They are going to heaven because that is exactly what they deserve. But, sir, you are telling me that you are going to heaven and yet you describe for me in the most horrendous way all the reasons why you should not. Why, sir, are you going to heaven?”

And the Christian cries out, “Because I am going to heaven based upon the virtue and the merit of another, Jesus Christ, my Lord. Christ making much of him, much of Christ. Everything is Christ.”

“Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption...”²⁰

I love all sorts of music, but sometimes I have problems with certain Christian music, problems with my own Christian speech at times. When we begin to use words lightly.

“Brother, I have been redeemed.”

“What? What?”

An old Puritan who they said of him that after he would use certain words in in Scripture he would remain silent and his lip would tremble.

²⁰ Romans 3:24

“I have been redeemed.” Redemption, the price paid to liberate a captive or a slave. And you were not redeemed with trinkets, blood of silver and blood of goats. You were redeemed by the blood of God’s own Son.²¹

There is enough truth in that statement to carry you on to glory if you understand it. Nothing else do I need. That is why I hate preaching that tries to use something other than Jesus Christ to get me to accept salvation.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea.

Don’t tell me he will heal me. I don’t care.

Don’t tell me he will give me a fine car or a wonderful home or insurance or my best life now. I don’t need it.

Tell me one thing. Did he shed his own blood for my soul? Then don’t cheapen the call.

As old Leonard Ravenhill used to say, “Christ will offer you two things: eternal life and a tree to die on. But because of his blood, ‘tis enough, ‘tis enough.”

And the motivation, oh my dear friends. So many of you take mission trips and it is a wonderful thing and you go over there and you say, “This is a wonderful life.”

Yes, it is for the first six weeks. It can be hell. Even when you are not persecuted, even when people are not knocking down your doors, you have no idea the difference between a few weeks and six months when things are no loner new and it is no longer happy and it is not fun and it takes you four days just to find truck tires and you realize that every time you pray the Hallelujah Chorus doesn’t break out and there’s just a lot of hard monotonous work and you feel so alone that your bones are screaming.

You need something more than acquire the fire to keep you there. You need something more than Christian music. You even need something more than a call. You need to know and grow all the days of your life in this. He shed his own blood for my soul. He shed his own blood for my soul. That is what propels a missionary.

A missionary, make no mistake, he may not have physical chains around his arms, but he is a prisoner and if he is not a prisoner he is not a missionary. They are imprisoned with something much stronger and at times much more terrible than chains. It is the love of Jesus Christ that constrains them.

When you work and work and work and then after all your work is done everything falls part, a five minute wind blows it all away and to pick it all back up again. There is only one thing that can make you do that. He shed his own blood for my soul.

²¹ See 1 Peter 1:18

And my value is not measured and great leaders of great conventions need to understand this. The missionaries value is not measured by success. It is measured by faithfulness. It is measured by faithfulness. And not even faithfulness to another's call or another's power, but to their own station that God has given them and their own thing they do in his name.

You can tell I was a missionary.

He shed his own blood to buy my redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Just recently in Colossians, just going through the Greek text and understanding that the text... not necessarily says, "Created by him," by Christ, but "created in him."²²

Everything that has ever been done by God has been done in and for the Son. Everything is about the Son and that is the way we should be. Everything about him. We are not excited about missions. You can turn missions into idolatry. Excited about him.

When I pray for my little boys at night I don't pray, "Oh, God make them great preachers," because there's a lot of great preachers who will die and go to hell. "Don't make them great this or great that, but, oh Father, take them, take their hearts. Give it to your Son. Let them be prisoners of your Son. Let them be driven by passion even if they are only driving a broom as a janitor that they have more passion one sweep than in a thousand sermons of a cold hearted preacher in Christ."

A young man walked up to me one time and said, "You are right, brother Paul, Jesus Christ is all we need."

I said, "Young man, is all we have. There is nothing outside of him."

There are just two spheres of existence: Adam, Christ; death, life; condemnation, justification. And it goes on.

"Whom God displayed publicly."²³

I want you to look at this. Speaking about the cross Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that "God placquered him," a good English word. He placquered him. He put him up like a sign that you see on the side of the road. He wanted it to be in the most visible place.

He could have put away sin in so many other places, but he chose the sinful city of the universe, the greatest religious mecca of the universe. And outside that city at the crossroads he placquered his Son.

Why? Salvation is more... the cross is more than just salvation of men. The cross is for the revelation of God, that in the cross we might know who God is.

²² See Colossians 1:16

²³ Romans 3:24

And it says that God displayed him publicly as a propitiation.²⁴ In my opinion, absolutely the most important word in the entire Bible, other than the names of God. Propitiation, a propitiation, because this answers a question. This answers the greatest question, a question that if you have been sensitive to this text you realize, a question that if you have been sensitive to this text it has literally dropped open your jaw, a divine dilemma, a problem that cannot be solved a bolder to be moved. It is a major... it is the gospel and you have got to understand this. And what do you have to understand? It is this problem.

It says here in verse 23 that, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”²⁵ And it says in 24, “Some of them were justified.” That is wrong.

You say, “What is wrong?”

There is a problem. I want you just to go, just for a moment to the book of Proverbs to understand what I mean when I say that is wrong. Chapter 17 verse 15. “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.”²⁶

Now what is an abomination? There is just no word for it. It is too strong. It is the most heinous, loathsome, beyond words, beyond definition, disgust. And what does it say? “He who justifies the wicked... [is] an abomination to the LORD. He who justifies the wicked... [is] an abomination.”²⁷

But then we look in Romans three and what do we see? God justifies the wicked.

Have you ever thought about that? If God is just, he cannot forgive you. If God is holy, he cannot fellowship with you. He cannot, not because there is some law above him that constrains him, but his own nature. If God is just, he cannot forgive men because men are wicked and the judge of all the earth must do right.

The greatest problem in all the gospel is this. If God is just, he cannot forgive the wicked.

You say, “Well, I don’t understand the problem.”

Of course you don’t. Look at our culture. It is not actually a culture of justice, is it? We are not reading ancient books on law. I doubt very seriously that any presidential candidate is reading Rutherford’s *Lex Rex*, the law of the king. You see, we are a people of unclean lips. We drink down iniquity like it was water. We know not our left hand from our right.

²⁴ See Romans 3:24

²⁵ Romans 3:23

²⁶ Proverbs 17:15

²⁷ Ibid.

But here is the problem. Let me put it before you. In modern vernacular, let's say that you go home tonight and your entire family... you find them, you left them home, you go home and your entire family is slaughtered on the floor. And standing over your final breathing member is the murderer with blood on his hands. He strangles the life out of your last child. You run across the room. You throw him to the floor. You tie him up and you call the police. And the police take him away to prison and then finally to the judge.

And this man who has murdered your entire family stands before the judge here in this county and the judge looks down at him and says, "I am a very loving judge. I forgive you. Go home."

You are going to scream out, "I demand justice." You are going to write the newspapers. You are going to call the media. You are going to be sending letters to senators and Congress and you are going to say that there is a judge on the bench far more vile than the criminals who stand before him. It is the work of a judge to do justice.

It is not right. It is twisted and wrong and dark and horrid and society collapses and we can not live under such a moral strain. You demand such justice from your judges, what about your God?

The greatest question in all of Christian theology is this. How can God be just and at the same time the justifier of the wicked? That's the greatest problem in all of Scripture?

Isn't it amazing? I say things like that and I look at people and they go, "I have never heard that before in my life." And yet it is the very central part of the gospel.

I think we have lost it, folks. We have taken the gospel of Jesus Christ... we wonder why it had... the gospel has so little power. And so we have got to do all this church growth stuff and everything else and you just can't preach the gospel anymore because it doesn't have power. It can't draw generation X or Y or Z or anything else because we are not preaching the gospel anymore. A truncated creedal form, but it is not the gospel. The gospel is powerful and it is deadly. It is life giving and it is scandalous.

But therein lies the power of God for salvation. How can a just God forgive wicked men and still be just? A propitiation.

[?] we use the word [?] in [?] an old Spanish version, [?]. "Master, be propitious or merciful to me."

Just imagine for a minute, imagine we are 500 years ago and we are invited to [?] we are in Spain and I am a slave. And the punishment for a slave is that if he is stealing he is killed. That is law. That is what the law says. You must die. And so I am stealing.

And my ammo, my master comes in and he catches me and he grabs me by the collar with full witness around him and he begins to drag me to the gallows and I fall down on my knees and I say, [?], "Be propitious to me. Be merciful to me."

You say, “Well, now the master has to make a choice. Now there is a problem. Law demands my death. Justice demands that I die.”

There is a sense in which I am asking my master to disobey the law, to turn a blind eye to justice and to let my sin go.

As I have said, society cannot bear that strain, neither does the kingdom of heaven and a just God most certainly will not.

Before God can forgive wicked men and declare them right, justice must be satisfied.

Now we need to be very careful here. When I say justice must be satisfied I am not saying that there is some great law over God that even he, himself, must submit to. No. When I say justice must be satisfied I am saying God’s justice must be satisfied.

Have you ever heard preachers go, “God could have been just with you, but instead of being just he was loving”?

Do you have any idea what the preacher just said? God’s love is unjust.

No, my friend, God is love and God is just and in love God satisfies his justice with a sacrifice, a propitiation, a sacrifice powerful enough to satisfy God’s justice, appease God’s wrath against man and make it possible for a just God to receive wicked men and to declare them right with him even though their works scream out the opposite.

Well, what kind of sacrifice do we need? We are well instructed in that the blood of bulls and goats cannot do this work. A son of Adam has sinned. A son of Adam must die. Man has sinned. Man has fallen. Man deserves death. In hell under the wrath of God throughout all eternity there is only one way to save a man, satisfy justice and put away that wrath, appease it.

How must that be done?

As I have said, it requires a man. But then, again, it requires more than a man. The one who dies in the place of men must be a son of Adam, but he also must be the Son of God, God the Son, the fulness of deity.

And you say, “Why?”

Well, let’s look at some reasons. First of all Jonah in the belly of a fish said a very wise thing that I think we have forgotten, “Salvation is of the LORD. Salvation is of the LORD.”²⁸ That is why the doctrine of the Jehovah Witnesses is such an abomination because they are saying that the Lord of glory made a creature and sent him down to correct our condition and to make reconciliation possible. If that is true, then a creature

²⁸ Jonah 2:9

has saved us and a creature is worshipped. But the Bible says the opposite. “Salvation is of the LORD.”²⁹ And he shares that title with no one, not archangel, not king. The one who dies on that tree must be God because “Salvation is of the LORD.”³⁰

There is another reason. Who else but God could withstand the wrath of God? Don't you understand that mountains melt before his wrath and rivers dry up and the sea bows its head in fear.

Young men sometimes tell me, “I will stand before God one day.”

No, you won't. You will melt before him like a tiny wax figurine before a blast furnace.

Who can withstand the wrath of God and rise again? Who can be dealt with so harshly and retake his life?

Another thought maybe is this. It is not spoken of much, but I think it has some weight to it. A life must be given. And just who exactly has a life to give?

You say, “Well, if God would have found man obedient...”

That man obedient does not have life in himself. It is borrowed life. If he gives away a life, he has given away a life given to him by God. But Jesus said, “I have authority to lay down my life and to take it back up again.”³¹ Because it was his. He wasn't giving a borrowed commodity. He was laying down his own life for the sake of his people.

Finally, one time I was at a university speaking and after a question and answer time a young man shot up and said, “Ok, preacher, I have got a question for you. How can one man suffer for a few short hours on a tree and save a multitude of men from an eternity in hell? It is not just.”

And I said, “Oh, young man, thank you for that question.”

That one man on that tree could suffer for a few short hours on that tree and save a multitude of men from an eternity in hell because that one man on that tree was worth more than all of them put together.

You take everything that is—crickets and clowns and mountains and molehills and stars and galaxies and fields of wheat, livestock, men without number—and you put them in the scale. You put Jesus Christ on the other side and he outweighs them all. That is why he had to be God and that is how he died for us.

When theologians speak about the perfect sacrifice of Christ they are not simply talking about his sinless perfection. They are speaking about his infinite worth.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See John 10:17

Oh, what a price was given, oh what a price was paid, oh what a great thing done when he shed his blood on that tree.

Now we are to go on for a moment. We are not going to get through all of this, but we are going to hit a major part.

Several years ago when Mel Gibson came out with his film on the Christ. I never saw it, but I don't have... I am not mad about it. I am not mad at him or fight or anything else. But I recall I got email after email after email about the film, about it was wrong in this and wrong and that and this.

And when I would get an email I would just write him back and say, "I don't have near as much problem with Mel Gibson's film as I do with Baptist preaching." And I mean that.

When he came out with that film I heard a preacher, a very prominent preacher get up and say, "I am going to take my entire time over national radio to explain the cross of Christ."

I thought, "Oh, praise the Lord."

Shut off my thing. I was working out there on the farm. I shut off my truck and I just kind of just turned on the radio there and I was listening. He went for an hour explaining what the Jews did to Jesus. He went for part of that hour explaining what the Romans did to Jesus. He tells us about what the medical community says about the whip and the nails and the crown of thorns and the robe being put on and taken off and the ripping off of flesh and this and that and a spear in his side. And he never once, never once told us about the gospel.

My dear friend, if you are saved here tonight you are not saved because of what the Romans and Jews did to Jesus, not merely. If you are saved here tonight you are saved because of what God did to his own Son on that tree.

When I used to preach a lot in South America I developed a term I called [?], the romantic gospel. It is a Catholic gospel that will speak so much about all the physical sufferings of Christ, turn him into a martyr to be pitied, but not once mention the bearing of sin and the wrath of almighty God falling down upon the head of his Son.

All those little tracts of ours, God is on one side and man is on the other. There is a great separation. And what is the reason for that great separation? We have sinned and God is holy. How do you think that breach is going to be closed?

Because the Romans laid a whip on his back?

He is on that tree and he becomes sin. The holy, holy, holy one of God becomes sin. “Cursed is every man who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law to perform them.”³² Cursed.

Do you know what it means to be cursed? You won’t like this definition. It means that something is so vile before a holy God, so loathsome even before all the inhabitants of glory that the last thing that wicked man will hear when he takes his first step into hell is all of creation standing to its feet and applauding God because God has rid the earth of him.

You don’t believe that because you don’t know how wicked men are. And that is the problem with your gospel. That is why it has so little power and you have to juice it up with so many other things.

All men under a curse because all men have violated the law of God. “But Christ,” Paul goes on to say in Galatians chapter three verse 13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.”³³ And how did he do it? He became a curse for us.

As John Gill says, “He stood in our law place and took upon his head our guilt.”

Some of you dear sisters here tonight, let’s say that you were going out to the streets of Chicago and you were witnessing to the prostitutes there. And all of the sudden the paddy wagon pulls up and takes all prostitutes away to jail. But in the police mistake they pull you in the paddy wagon with you and they treat you just as one of them.

As you are all in that paddy wagon the women are laughing and telling jokes. They have done this 1000 times. They are so accustomed to it. You are in utter terror and shame.

They take you down to the precinct. They finger print you. They throw you in jail. The women are dancing and singing and laughing and poking fun at the police. You are about to die. Your heart has disintegrated into so many pieces and cannot be found.

They are accustomed to it. You are not.

And so Christ, like I said... we drink down iniquity like it was water. Does a fish know it is wet?

But Christ, sinless takes upon himself our sin and then he cries out from that tree, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁴

If I hear one more preacher say that the Father turned his face away because he could not bear to look at his Son because of the suffering inflicted upon him by the hands of wicked men, I think I will go ballistic. That is not what he says.

³² See Galatians 3:10

³³ Galatians 3:13

³⁴ Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁵

It is because the Son of God on that tree became sin. And God turned away because he cannot look upon sin, iniquity. Someone had to die.

Remember going back to those tracts. Someone has to die separated from God, outside of his favorable presence to close that breach. Christ the Messiah comes. He goes to that tree. He takes your filth upon himself and he dies outside of the favorable presence of God, cut off from the people of God. And, thus, it says, “He died outside the gates of the city.” He is like that scapegoat.

The nation of Israel comes out. Their leaders lay their hands upon the head of the goat symbolically transferring the sin of God’s people to that goat and then one goat is killed and another is driven out into the wilderness to die alone. So does Christ suffer on that tree outside of not only his people’s presence, but the presence of his God.

In Psalms 22 we hear the crying out, the same thing. He takes it from Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,”³⁶ the psalmist says. “Why are you so far away from the words of my groaning?”³⁷

And then he gives a complaint. He says, “By day and by night I cry out to you and you do not answer.”³⁸

And then he gives an argument. There has never been a time in the history of your covenant people that a righteous man has cried out to you and you have turned away, but I, your own Son hang upon this tree and I cry out to you. And you do not answer, why?³⁹

And then he gives his answer in 22:3 and 22:6. “You are the whole one and I am a worm.”⁴⁰

You say, “Yes, brother Paul, he died under the wrath of God. He died separated.”

But let’s understand what those terms mean. He is in a garden of Gethsemane and he cries out, “Let this cup pass from me. Let this cup pass from me. Let this cup pass from me.”⁴¹

What was in the cup? Again, preachers, “He didn’t want to go to that Roman cross. He didn’t want those nails. He is sweating drops of blood because he doesn’t want that Roman whip, that cat-o-nine-tails falling across his back.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Psalm 22:1

³⁷ See Psalm 22:1

³⁸ See Psalm 22:2

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See Psalm 22:3, 6

⁴¹ See Matthew 26:39

Let me ask you a question. Is the captain of our salvation of less courage and less boldness than those who follow him? Is it not true that we have a history of 50 million, possibly martyrs? Isn't it true that not long after his resurrection and ascension martyrs went to crosses and they went to crosses being nailed and whipped and pitched with tar and set on fire and yet they sang hymns with their chests out glad to do it? Are you telling me that the captain of our salvation cowers in a garden, but because he is afraid of a Roman cross that millions of his followers died on joyfully?

What kind of Savior do you know?

What was in the cup?

I remember being at a classical... reformed classical school years ago and I went to the headmaster and the headmaster said, "Well, brother Paul, you are going to be speaking to kindergarten through 12th grade."

And I thought, "Well, that's rather wide."

And they said... I said, "You know, I am going to teach on propitiation."

Well, it won't be a problem.

So I walk in. Second grade teacher comes up to me and he says, "Brother Paul," he goes, "What are you going to be teaching on?"

I said, "Propitiation."

He said, "Oh, wonderful we are going to be... we have been working on that for about six weeks now in class."

I said, "Oh, really? What world am I in right now?"

And so I stood up there and I said, "Propitiation." And I began to talk and then I asked. I said, "Class, does anyone know what was in the cup?"

And little eight or nine year old girl went... And said, "Yes."

She stood up, laid her hand on the desk as one is supposed to when they are in that kind of school and she said, "Sir, the wrath of almighty God was in the cup."

I said, "Behold, the wisdom of children."

Eight out of 10 preachers could not tell you that."

Again, let me tell you this. The problem in this country is not liberal politics. It is conservative preachers.

The wrath of God, the wrath of God, the wrath of God that when Christ was on that tree...

I was in Europe probably about five years ago and I was teaching in a Germanic type seminary. And I went in after... it was a long day and I went in the library and I thought, "Well, I'll just look around and see if I can find a book I can read, something in English."

And I came to a book, *The Cross of Christ* and it wasn't John Stott's book it was another book. I didn't know the author. And I pulled it off and I began to thumb through it thinking, "Ok, let's find out what this guy is saying."

And I get to this point and this is what he said. "The Father in heaven looked down upon his Son and he suffering that was inflicted upon him by the hands of men and counted that as payment for our sin."

That is heresy. I do not want to take anything away from what happened to our Christ physically, but that is heresy.

We are not saved because of what the Romans did to him. We are saved because of what God did to him.

Have you never read, "And it pleased the Lord to crush him"⁴² That's when he was on that tree. All the perfect, brilliant, hot, white justice, holy justice of almighty God was focused upon one individual on a mountain and came crashing down with the full force of the holy hatred of God against the wickedness of men.

Someone had to die under the wrath of God.

Now here is something I want you to think about. Men not only have a problem with God. God has a problem with men. And if you don't understand that, you don't understand the gospel and you are not in the historical line of Christianity.

People will tell me, "Brother Paul, I have been saved."

I say, "From what?"

"From sin."

"Sin wasn't after you. Sin was the cause of your problem. What have you been saved from?"

I will tell you what you have been saved from. God has saved you for himself, by himself and God has saved you from himself, the perfect justice, holiness of God that will one

⁴² See Isaiah 53:10

day come crashing down upon the nations. And the greatest captains and kings of the world will cry out for the rocks to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. He saved you from that because that Lamb died upon that tree in your place.

You read the story of Abraham and Isaac and he takes that only Son of his up to that mountain and he ties him and he puts him on those limbs, about to set a fire we don't know. But we know that the old man lays his hand upon the brow of his son and with a knife gives his will over to God to come down crashing upon his boy's chest, to slaughter him, his only Son. And right when his will is given in to the will of God, his hand is stayed.

And you say, "What a wonderful ending to the story."

Ending? That wasn't the ending. That was the intermission. Hundreds of years later, a millennium or two later God lays his hand upon the brow of his only begotten Son and takes that knife out of Abraham's hand and throws it down upon the chest of his only begotten Son and slaughters him on that tree.

You say, "Well, I never heard of such a thing."

I'm sure you have heard it here. You just haven't been listening. I say it this way so that you will understand the transaction on that tree. God is just. He cannot simply justify the wicked. Justice must be satisfied, the wrath of God appeased, the death of God's own Son.

Do you wonder why maybe now there is so little power in all the preaching that we do? It is so creedal. I mean, how can you get passionate about four spiritual laws or five things God wants you to know?

Look at what we do. Preach a gospel sermon. A person comes down and we counsel with him five minutes and declare them saved by our own word. And then we take them on to discipleship to go on to greater things and we never touch the gospel with him.

That is one of the reasons why the great majority of people in our churches today are unconverted. They don't even... this country is not gospel hardened, it is gospel ignorant because so are its preachers.

You say, "Brother Paul, you are a hard man."

I know these are hard things. But they are true. They are just true. And one of the reasons why we have to turn the church of America today into a six flags over Jesus is because there is no longer any power and there is no longer any power because where has the preaching gone? The praying gone? The sacrificial love based upon the atoning death of Christ, where has it gone? He died, crushed under the wrath of God.

Imagine yourself standing a mile away from a dam 1000 miles high and 1000 wide filled to the brim with water and all of the sudden the dam is pulled away and that destructive force comes down upon your head, but right before it reaches you the ground opens up and swallows it down. So has Christ saved you from the wrath of God. And he died and he rose again for our or because of our justification.

God's resurrection of his Son is God's public declaration that our sins have been atoned for.

It is paid.

When Christ died upon the cross he vindicated God. And when God resurrected his Son he vindicated him.

You say, "What do you mean, brother Paul, vindicated God?"

That's the whole argument of Paul. He is saying here, "This was to demonstrate his righteousness."

Whose righteousness?

God's.

Why does God have to prove his righteousness?

Because of this. "In the forbearance of God he passed over sins previously committed."⁴³

Now I would love to go into this. I don't have time. But let me just say this. This is what it means. Imagine an accuser before God. Imagine the accuser before God.

Do you know that Satan and the angels, though we know so very little about it, not enough to write a book, they fell, they were cast out. There was something that went on that perfect justice was distributed, was measured out to him, perfect justice.

And there was no explanation needed, justice. But can you imagine the accuser in dealing with God's dealing with men? God, "Adam, the wages of sin is death. You eat of that tree you will die, Adam."

"You showed mercy? Where is your justice? Oh, and Abraham, not even Abraham. Go back to Noah. Noah, he should have died with the rest of them. Oh, and Abraham, your friend? Should I point out that he put his wife in jeopardy through thinking of his own self, lying, did not believe you on a few cases I remember. Oh, and David, a man after your own heart. He was an adulterer. He had a man murdered. He was lifted with pride. He did not obey the laws of the king. Where is your justice, God? How can you save?

⁴³ Romans 3:25

Spare Adam at least for a time. How can you pull Noah from a flood? How can you call Abraham a friend and how can you call David a son?"

And God points to that tree and he says, "Because my Son died for them all."

And so once and for all the justice of God is vindicated.

Let me put it this way. It is not very fashionable. Sinner, do you want to know what God will do to you one day if you reject Christ? Well, let me put it this way. When his own Son bore sin, God crushed him. What do you think he will do to you?

Again, this is not the God of contemporary Christianity. But it is the one of Scripture. He died. He rose again.

And I will finish with this. I love the patristics. I hated them when I was in seminary because I got graded on them all the time and they are a very difficult bunch to understand. But they used to take the ascension psalm of 24 and use it with regard to Christ. Christ dies and he rises from the dead.

But now let's go for a moment to Job, that great cry of distress, of that early patriarch, "Oh, if there was someone who could lay his hands on us both, stretch out his hands far enough to reach God and stretch out his hands far enough to reach me."

As Spurgeon used to say, "A ladder that only reaches to the top and not to the bottom is no good and a ladder that reaches to the bottom, but not the top is no good."

Is there someone?

Now, as evangelical Christians and as Baptist and Southern Baptists we have rightly so defended the deity of Christ. We must always defend that. He is God. But sometimes in our defending we forget, he is man. "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."⁴⁴

God, yes, man, yes. We needed a God to stand for us. We needed a man to stand for us. And that man came and he lived a perfect life and he died a perfect, sufficient death and he rose again from the dead and 40 days later he ascended up and the old guys used to say this. "The Christ the man stands before the gates of glory and he cries out, 'Lift up your heads oh gates and be lifted up old ancient doors that the King of Glory may come in.'"⁴⁵

And from the inside those doors there is such a shock and you hear this answer in reply. "Who is this King of Glory?"⁴⁶

⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 2:5

⁴⁵ See Psalm 24:9

⁴⁶ See Psalm 24:10

It is as though they are saying, “No man has ever made it tot these doors. No man has ever dared stretch forth his hand to touch the latch of this gate. Who is this King of Glory?”

And then Christ cries out, “The Lord, strong and might, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads oh gates and be lifted up old ancient doors that the King of Glory may come in.”⁴⁷

And for the first time in all of time the gates of heaven were opened to a man, a man for us.

What was it like?

All hail the power of Jesus’ name, let angels prostrate fall.
Bring for the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all.

Can you imagine the man in flesh walking up to the throne of God and without one hesitation or doubt taking each step with greater measure of glory and sitting down at the right hand of his Father and his Father not with a question, but with an affirmation look at him and say, “Son, it is finished, Father. It is finished, indeed”⁴⁸

And this same Jesus whom you crucified God has made him both Lord and Christ.⁴⁹

I never tell a man to make Jesus Lord of his life. That is the most absurd statement that could ever be made. Jesus is Lord of your life. God has made him so. The only thing you can make, gentlemen is an idol. But God has made this Jesus Lord and Christ. And this same Jesus who ascended up will return in glory and power to redeem a bride for himself and to judge the nations with a rod of iron.

A message like this requires more than the simple creedal question: Now would you like to open up your heart and ask Jesus to come in? That is not the gospel call. It is God has commanded all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel and the assurance that you have truly believed is not because some leader went to you and said, “Now you are saved.” The assurance will be the enduring work of God in your life. You will bear fruit or you are not saved.

He will capture you and take you and train you and teach you and lead you and discipline you or you are just one other American who has a false hope because of false preachers and will stand before God and be judged.

But know this. You have been warned here tonight that the gospel is a fragrance of life to some and it is the smell of death to others.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See Psalm 24:9

⁴⁸ See John 19:30

⁴⁹ See Acts 2:36

⁵⁰ See 2 Corinthians 2:16

But this is the gospel. Repent and believe.

Now tonight if you are fearing for your soul I will stay here all night with the other pastors and missionaries. Surely someone around here can tell you about Jesus. And we will look through the Scriptures if it takes all night. I promise you it won't take five minutes. It will take far longer.

And I won't you to ask me to give you my hand and Jesus your heart because that is just more worthless jargon. I will say, "Repent." And I will help you understand what that means. I will say, "Believe" and I will help you understand what that means.

Let's pray.

Father, help your people and they will be helped. Amen.

Pastor...