

Did Christ Descend into Hell?

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I believe that after our time together tonight you'll be singing that song afresh in your heart in light of what we have to say. You know, whenever you open the word of God and study it, it's a holy time. It's a sacred, set apart time because God's word is from him. It's his word and it's that which speaks words of life. It speaks words of comfort. It speaks words of truth to us and so we always want to handle it with care and with a reverence that is worthy of its sacred subject matter and tonight is particularly a time like that as we go to the cross and we contemplate the sufferings of Christ and what transpired after the death of Christ on the cross. We're going to answer this question here this evening: did Christ descend into hell? Did Christ descend into hell? We're going to ask that question and answer it here this evening. The reason that we're addressing this topic is because as we were preaching through Ephesians a few weeks ago, we came upon chapter 4, verses 9 and 10, and I invite you to turn there as our starting point. This may sound like a slightly esoteric subject but actually by the time that we get through our time together tonight you're going to find how precious it is to contemplate this subject from a biblical perspective.

When we taught through Ephesians, we came to verses 9 and 10 of chapter 4 and it said, "Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things." When we looked at that text, I mentioned in passing that some teachers would look at this passage and see support for the idea that after he died, Jesus Christ descended into hell for various purposes that are suggested by various teachers. They base this on the fact that the Scripture says that Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth; they take the lower parts of the earth to be a reference to Sheol, hell, the realm of the dead and so forth. And we said at the time that we wanted to come back and address that, to address that whole issue was going to take us on a 45 minute tangent that I just didn't want to do at that particular time. So tonight is the tangent from a few weeks ago and it gives us a chance for me to be faithful to my promise to address that issue.

Now, some say that Christ descended into hell after his death on the cross. Many liturgical churches recite the Apostles' Creed week after week which says in part that "Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended to hell." And they repeat that week after week, I'm sure with most of them not giving any thought really to what those words mean and what the implications of it might be.

Perhaps some of you come from a church like that where you repeated that over and over and over again without really contemplating what it meant. Some say, who believe this doctrine, some say that Christ went to hell in order to deliver Old Testament saints who were waiting the application of his redemption so he was springing them out of prison, so to speak. Still others think that Christ went to hell in order to proclaim the Gospel, to give some who were lost a chance to believe before their doom was sealed. Now, that's a violation of Hebrews 9:27 which says we are destined to die once and after that to face judgment but that's what some people teach. Still others teach that Christ descended into the pit where demons abide in order to proclaim his triumph over them. The idea is that he was crucified on the cross, he had successfully defeated sin and Satan and death and therefore he went into the abyss in order to proclaim his victory and to tell them that despite his death he was victorious over them.

Now, all of those theories hang on one very big assumption. It hangs on the assumption that Christ went to hell in order to do something, whatever you think the purpose of that was. He went to hell to do something and so the assumption is that Christ went down into the pit, went into the abyss, after he died on the cross. The question that we want to answer tonight is simply this: did he? Did he do that? We want to examine those claims by Scripture tonight. It's not enough simply that this has been repeated many times since the Apostles' Creed was finalized in the 8th century. Although it's called the Apostles' Creed, it wasn't actually written by the apostles. That document has a long history of development on its own and the phrase that "He descended into hell" actually didn't appear in any version of the Apostles' Creed until about the 4th century, the late 4th century. So the fact that it's called the Apostles' Creed and it says that does not bind us to believe that if it cannot be proven from Scripture.

To state the question for tonight a little bit differently and I've been amazed, frankly, by how refreshing it was to my heart to consider this question. The question is this: what happened to Christ between the time that he died on the cross and his resurrection? What can we say about that time? And the fact that tradition and some teachers say that he went into hell, before we accept that, before we believe that, before we honor that as being biblical truth, we want to see whether it stands the test of biblical scrutiny or not and that's what we should do with any biblical teaching, frankly. The Bible commends the Bereans in Acts 17:11 after they heard the teaching of the Apostle Paul, they examined the Scriptures daily to see whether what he was teaching them was so. So we are called upon to test truth claims by Scripture and to search out the word of God for ourselves and sometimes when you do that, you find at the end of your study, you find something that's just exceedingly sweet and precious and that's what we're going to have here tonight.

I'm going to build this message on a two-part hinge basically. We're going to, first of all, consider the biblical support for a descent into hell. What is it that these teachers rely on? What Scriptures do they point to in order to support their assertion that Christ was somehow in the realm of the dead with the demons in the abyss in order to do something or another? What Scriptures would they look at to support their view? We want to look at that. Well, we looked at one already in Ephesians 4:9. Let's look at that again and we just want to examine this carefully. We believe that God's word is worthy of careful

examination. We think that we will be accountable to God for what we have believed and taught and so we want to get it right, not only for the sake of our accountability to God but we believe that the more accurately we handle Scripture, the more effective we will be in our witness and in our Christian lives and so this matters even though the topic might seem a little bit unusual to devote an entire message to.

In Ephesians 4:9 it says, "this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?" Now, I addressed this matter and I interpreted this for us a few weeks ago during my exposition and I'm not going to repeat all of that here, simply to state this by way of observation for this evening: in this passage, Paul says nothing about demons; he says nothing about departed human spirits or about Christ actually preaching to anyone in this passage. What he's actually doing is making a simple point about the ascension. He's saying that Christ, after his resurrection, was able to ascend to heaven simply because, or based on the fact, that he had previously made a prior descent to earth. The ascension, in other words, because Christ is preexistent, the ascension assumes that there was a prior descent and all Paul is saying here is that Christ descended down to earth and humbled himself in the Incarnation so that he would be able to offer a righteous life on the cross for the salvation of our sins. So Christ could ascend to heaven because he had first lowered himself to earth. That's all that he's saying there. There is no mention of demons. There is no mention of descending into hell. That has to be read into the passage by a prior assumption.

Well, another passage that these proponents will go to is in Psalm 16, another passage that we have studied in recent weeks. So turn over to Psalm 16 for a moment. Psalm 16:10, a very important passage in its own right where David, speaking prophetically of the Lord Jesus says, "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." So this passage is looked at and they say, "There it is, Christ is in Sheol," and then they extrapolate from that that he was doing something or another that is there. But it's reading too much and it's really not doing justice to that term Sheol in its Old Testament usage. This is a reference to the realm of the dead and you can see that by the parallel line there in verse 10 that simply says "You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay." In other words, God was not going to abandon his Son to experience that the decay of death while he was in the grave and the New Testament, as we have seen in past studies, takes this passage and applies to it a statement about the resurrection. The New Testament helps us understand the thrust of this Old Testament passage.

Look over at Acts 2, if you would. Both Peter and Paul quote this verse in their preaching in the book of Acts. What do they say about it? Do they create this picture of Christ entering into hell as being the proper application of that verse? No, they don't, actually. Peter is preaching in verse 29 of Acts 2 and he says, "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead," and did what? "He spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay." He says in quoting this verse from Psalm 16, he

says David was speaking about the resurrection. He was talking about the fact that God would not suffer his Son to undergo physical decay while he was in the grave and so he would raise him from the dead and he speaks of the resurrection in this context. He doesn't speak about Christ descending into hell.

Look over at Acts 13, where the Apostle Paul also deals with this passage from Psalm 16 and connects it to the good news. In Acts 13:32, he says, "We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; Today I have begotten You.' As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead," notice the emphasis on the resurrection here, "no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give You the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.'"

So these passages from Psalm 16 interpreted by Acts 2 and Acts 13 says that this is a reference to the resurrection. It is silent on any manner of consideration about whether Christ went into hell or not and so those verses don't prove what these proponents of this view need them to say. It's limited. It's narrow. There is no discussion in Ephesians 4 about hell or demons. There is no discussion in Psalm 16 as interpreted by Acts 2 and Acts 13 about Christ going into hell. It's simply a focus on his resurrection. That's important.

Now, the most common passage used to support this idea of a descent into hell is found in 1 Peter and we need to spend a little more time there. Turn over to 1 Peter 3 and I just encourage you to stay with me because what we're laying is a groundwork that is going to cause you to rejoice in the end. 1 Peter 3:18-20. This is a very complicated passage. It has many knotty theological problems wrapped up in it and we're going to try to just isolate one thread of it so that we can understand the subject at hand this evening. Actually, let's back up just a bit to 1 Peter 3:14. This occurs in the context of Peter trying to encourage believers in the midst of their suffering, in the midst of being persecuted for being followers of Christ and he says, "Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled." Verse 16, "keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame." So he says, "I understand that you're suffering opposition. I understand that wicked people who disbelieve Christ are opposing you and making life miserable for you." So he writes to encourage them.

Verse 17, he says, "It is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." Verse 18, he draws a parallel, he points them to what happened to Christ in order to encourage them. He says, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which," and so Peter doesn't bother with breaking his sentences up. He just kind of goes into an extended complex sentence. Christ was "made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight

persons, were brought safely through the water." I need to take a breath after that long sentence to catch up with it a little bit.

So the idea here in this passage is to, in terms of those who believe in the the descent of Christ into hell, where do they see it in this passage? Well, it's not unreasonable; it's not that this is constructed out of thin cloth. One writer says it this way and this is the view that we are evaluating. One writer says this: between Christ's death and resurrection, his living spirit went to the demon spirits bound in the abyss and proclaimed that in spite of his death he had triumphed over them. So the idea is that after Christ died on the cross and before he was bodily resurrected, he went on a journey, he went to a place, he went to the abyss, and pronounced his victory to demons who had previously exposed him. So that's the idea. That's really the best argument, I think, in favor of this view.

What should we think about that? Well, let's look a little bit closer at what Peter is saying. It's not enough just to get a general impression based on a passage and a reading of a passage, we need to consider what Peter actually says. Here's the question: when did this proclamation take place according to what Peter wrote? As you look at this passage and you read it with fresh eyes, you realize that he's not emphasizing 3 days after the resurrection at all. That's not his point whatsoever. Leave out the audience of what he's writing and just follow through, taking out who Christ spoke to and just look at what it says about the time frame. Go back to verse 18, Christ was "made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation." Now, we're going to skip over "to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient." We're just going to take that clause out and set it to the side for the moment so we can see the way the verb relates to the adverbial clause around it speaking to the time in which this occurred. When was it? He made proclamation to the spirits, "when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark." Christ was making this proclamation, and we'll explain this more in a moment, but he was making this proclamation in the days of Noah not in the 3 days that followed his resurrection. You drop the audience, you follow the time frame and you see what he is saying. Peter here is not referring to Christ preaching after the cross. What he is saying is that Christ preached to rebellious men through the preaching of Noah during the days of Noah.

Now, I understand that you might be looking at your Bible or your notes and saying, "You haven't proven this to me yet." Well, that's fine. You should test what I say just like we test what other teachers say as well by the Scriptures. This is not a bare assertion in order to avoid a difficulty. Actually, when you read what Peter says in the whole context of his 2 letters, you start to get a pretty clear sense of what he's actually talking about here. Go back a couple of chapters to 1 Peter 1. This is not the first time that Peter has talked about the Spirit of Christ being involved in Old Testament revelation. That's very important to understand. Peter says as he's talking about the nature of biblical salvation, the redemption of a soul from sin, he says in verse 10, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries." He's talking about the Old Testament prophets who made predictions about the coming of Christ and what did these Old Testament prophets do? What did they want to know? Verse 11, they were "seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ

within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." Peter says that these Old Testament prophets had the Spirit of Christ speaking in them and through them before he was ever born in Bethlehem. Christ, the Spirit of Christ, was speaking in and through those prophets and they were trying to understand what the Spirit of Christ was saying to them.

Now, keep that in mind when you realize that later on in 2 Peter 2, Peter describes Noah not merely as the constructor of an ark but as a preacher of righteousness. Look at 2 Peter 2:5 where it says that God "did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly." And so the Bible describes Noah as a preacher of righteousness. Noah was appealing to the ungodly men of his age and calling them to repentance by his life and by his words. Now, who is it ultimately that is behind the speaker, the human speaker, when men are called to repent of their sins and when men are called to righteousness? Well, the one who speaks is ultimately the Spirit of Christ. Just as the Spirit of Christ was speaking in and through the prophets, he was speaking through the words of Noah to appeal to that ungodly generation and they rejected the message so that only 8 people were saved at the time. So Noah was testifying to the ungodly prior to the flood and as he preached, listen, the Spirit of God spoke through the preacher to the hearts of those who heard. Christ was preaching through Noah to an ungodly age and they rejected his message.

With that in mind, go back to 1 Peter 3. You say, "There still seems to be a loose thread here." Well, how are we to understand that he proclaimed to these spirits of men? What's the sequence here? Well, understand that there are 2 different time frames that are going on. There is a reference to when Christ preached in the days of Noah through Noah and then there is a second time frame here which is when Peter is writing. And so Peter is describing when he speaks of these spirits in prison, he's saying that, "They are now in prison at the time at which I am writing but beforehand, they were alive in the time of Noah." They heard the word of Christ through Noah and rejected it and so Christ preached to them in the days of Noah and now when Peter is writing, these spirits are in prison. You could understand it this way, true story: I met President Reagan when I was in college. In 1980, I met President Reagan while I was in college. Now, that's a true statement but there is a little bit of a time warp there. President Reagan was still campaigning for his office, this was in April 1980 when I shook his hand and had my moment in the sun with that man. He was campaigning for President. Later on he was elected and became President. Now when I describe meeting him, I can say, "I met President Reagan while I was in college," without asserting that he was President at the time that we met. There are overlaps of the time frames that are going on when you say that. Well, so it is here with Peter when he says that Christ made proclamation in the spirit to those who are in prison. Christ proclaimed to them while they were alive on earth, now they are in prison. They are in the bonds of hell in judgment for their sins.

So that's how we understand this passage. It's not the only way to understand it, to say this is a reference to Christ descending into hell at the time. There are other contextual reasons to make us question the propriety of that interpretation. Now, other passages are used to support the idea of Christ descending into hell but that gives you the idea where

these teachers are coming from. Frankly, in my opinion, I don't find it persuasive. I don't believe that that's what Scripture is teaching even though there are good men who believe that and teach it, as well as people in the Catholic Church and Lutheran Church and all of that. So here's the question then, it's one thing to critique a view, it's another thing to state positively what you think happened. What did happen after Christ died on the cross? What we're about to see is wonderful. It's very sweet and encouraging and it's an even more compelling reason to me to reject this idea that he descended into hell. It's one thing to look at their passages and say, "I don't think that's what this is teaching," but when this is taught, often there is a whole realm of Scriptural information that is overlooked and not mentioned or dealt with at all and that has everything to do with what we think. So what I want to do in this second part here, this is the second point this evening, is to give you a biblical alternative to a descent into hell. We've seen the biblical support for a descent into hell and offered you reasons why we don't accept their interpretation or at least why we strongly question it, but really here what we're about to see in a biblical alternative to a descent into hell to me is compelling. It's conclusive. It makes me never want to go back to that view ever again because of the transcendent greatness of what is described in Scripture which we are about to see as we enter into the sufferings of Christ on the cross.

What happened after his death and before his bodily resurrection? Beloved, Christ made it plain with his words from the cross during the crucifixion. When Christ's body was laid into the grave, what has happened to his spirit? Let me answer it and then give you support. God the Father received his soul pending his resurrection. God the Father received the spirit of Christ pending the resurrection when the spirit would be rejoined to that resurrected body on the third day. Christ's own words from the cross compel us to this conclusion. The nature of salvation and his finished work compel us to this conclusion. And as we see these things, what we're going to see is the completeness, the finality, the sufficiency of the death of Christ on the cross for sinners and in that sufficient work of Christ, we find our rest and we repose our souls in the perfect work of redemption that he accomplished on the cross.

Go to Luke 23, the biblical narrative about the crucifixion. You will recall that Christ was crucified between 2 men, one on either side of him. And initially in other passages, parallel passages in the Gospel, they both were casting insults at him but the one thief had a change of heart while he was being crucified and we see this recorded for us in Luke 23:33 where it says, "When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left." And our gracious Lord, having us in mind while he was on the cross because he was dying for our sins by name but now speaking to those who were his executioners, verse 34, "Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves." Well, put yourself on either side of the cross. Put yourself in the nails of those men that were being crucified with him and the normal revulsion and anger and hatred toward the man being crucified, toward his executioners, they hear something totally foreign to the context, something supernatural, something beyond humanity and they hear the man in the middle saying, "Father, forgive these men who are doing this to me." This is not natural. This is something that simple men do not do because we react against those who hurt us. We retaliate. We bear in anger

and react against those who do us harm. It is not natural for a man who is being crucified to pray to God for their forgiveness of what they are doing.

Well, whether it was the thief on the left or the right, I don't know or I don't recall. The thief hears that and has to start processing that in his mind and while he was originally casting insults, now something happened that arrested his attention and as he's listening to Christ and watching Christ in verse 35, "the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!'" What a display of the wickedness of the human heart.

Now, notice in verse 39, "One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!'" He said it loud enough so that the man on the other side of Jesus' cross could hear and he had had enough. He had seen this sinless one on the cross. He had heard him speak. He had seen this forgiving spirit. He had seen this lack of retaliation and somehow he recognized that he was in the presence of the Son of God and he says in verse 40, "the other answered, and rebuking him," rebuking the mocking criminal, "said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.'"

Now, remember, I skipped over it unfortunately. Let's go back to verse 38 for a second. This will teach me to skip over a verse. On the cross of Christ, "there was also an inscription above Him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'" A true statement. Jesus was the descendent of David entitled to his throne. And so the thief is hearing these things that are going on about him. He hears the words of Jesus. Somehow he has had a view of this inscription above Christ that calls him the King of the Jews and in his now repentant spirit, he accepts responsibility for his sins. He no longer argues against the judgment of God against him or the human judgment, I should say, against him, and he rebukes and stands apart from his co-person being crucified. He rejects the crowd in front of him and in a humble spirit says these words to Jesus, verse 42, "he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!'" I mean, my heart wants to burst out of the cavity in my chest right now just thinking about the significance of this. The power of God in salvation, so much so that a man could be hanging on a cross and hear a few words from Christ, see an inscription and realize that everything about Christ was true and to commend his soul to Christ in the midst of that and to deny himself in accepting his punishment and saying, "I'm suffering justly." To separate himself from the mocking crowd and to humbly entrust himself to Christ with the simple words, "Jesus, you remember me when you come into your kingdom." It's powerful, the utter humility of his heart and the simplicity and the purity of his trust in Christ at that time.

Now, what did Jesus say to him in response as it applies to what's going to happen after his death that before his bodily resurrection? Verse 43, "He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'" Notice a couple of things about this.

Notice the time frame: today. Notice who that thief was going to be with: you're going to be with me. Notice where they are going to be: they are going to be in paradise. They are going to be in the realm of God, not in the realm of demons. Christ didn't say, "I'm going to send you to heaven and I'll catch up with you in 3 days because I've got some other things to do here." No, his promise to this humble, repentant thief was a personal one that says, "You and I are going to be in paradise together very, very soon." And look: Christ and the thief were sharing a common suffering. In response to this thief's faith, Christ comforts him and encourages him with the promise that despite their common suffering, they soon would have a common relief in paradise, together, today. Now, the wonder of that just speaks to the glory of Christian salvation, doesn't it? That after a life of sin and in the midst of human judgment and on the verge of death, that thief could look to Christ and receive a promise like that in return. Salvation could not possibly be by works. It's by grace through faith in Christ alone and that's what that thief expressed and Christ tells him, "Hang in there just a little bit longer because today it's going to be really, really great with me."

Now, further in this passage, you see what I believe is another reason to reject the idea of a descent into hell. All of those views that we talked about assumed that Christ had, there was a reason for him to go there. He either had to release Old Testament saints or he had to proclaim victory to demons or he had to do whatever else has been suggested over the years, but there was still something for him to do after the cross. I don't believe that. I believe that's a denial of the finished work of Calvary to say that. Look at what he says in verse 46. He says, well, let's go to verse 44, "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last." What is he doing there? He's entering into the rest from his labor. He gives his soul over to the Father for safekeeping until the bodily resurrection. Here's the thing: why could he give his soul over? Why could he give his spirit over to his Father? It's because his spirit did not have to descend into hell to do anything further. Francis Turretin this, he says, "His soul was about to rest from all its labors and be based in the greatest joys." "Father, my work here on earth is done. My work is finished. I give my spirit over to you. I entrust my spirit to you as I enter into this human realm of death in the body." Having said this, verse 46, "He breathed His last."

Now, isn't all of that reinforced by other words that Christ entered, Christ said at the end from the cross? John 19, if you would. John 19:30, "Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!'" It's done. The work of redemption was over. It had been completed. There was no more obedience that needed to be rendered. The work of Christ on the cross had its crowning moment and everything that was necessary for redemption had been done. If Christ was still yet to go into the realm of the abyss in order to release Old Testament saints or to give a second opportunity for the Gospel or to proclaim things from demons, it wasn't finished. He still had more work ahead of him if the descent into hell was true. But no. No, Christ had already satisfied the demands of divine justice with his suffering in Gethsemane and with his suffering on the cross. He had borne the weight of eternal punishment on the cross. The work was finished. It was

over. It was done and that's why he could say, "It is finished." That's why he could say, "Father, I commend my spirit into your hands." That's why he can say to the thief, "Today you're going to be with me in paradise." It's not because he forgot his itinerary that he said that. It's not that he took a sudden detour and then came back. He didn't send the thief on ahead of him. He promised that thief the immediate presence of Christ in paradise which could not be true if Christ spent that interim time in hell.

Now, beloved, in this understanding of the work of Christ you find rest for your soul because this speaks to a greater reality of the perfection of the work of Christ on Calvary. When we sing "Jesus paid it all," we mean it. He paid it all on the cross. He did everything, listen, he did everything that was necessary for your salvation to secure you eternally. He did it all with the events leading up to and while he was hanging on that cross. He paid all of the penalty. He fulfilled all the demands of divine righteousness in that climactic act and there was nothing left to do afterwards. Christ fulfilled everything that was necessary for your salvation and you enter into his work. You are united with him in his work. And what does Scriptures say about us when we die? "To be absent from the body is," what? "To be present with the Lord," 2 Corinthians 5:8. And when these things start to dawn on your mind and in your understanding, when you realize that there was no more work for Christ to do, all of a sudden you have a fresh perspective on the fact that when you are a Christian there is no more work for you to do in order to earn your salvation either. The fact that it was finished for Christ means that it is also finished for you. A full righteousness is credited to your account. You are linked to the perfect righteousness of Christ when you put your faith in him and there is no more divine justice, there are no more pains of hell to be considered. It is all done and that was first established when Christ finished his work on the cross, committed his spirit to the Father, and entered into paradise with a repentant thief. When you receive Christ, you receive a perfect work, acceptable to God, which secures your soul for all of eternity.

You know, if you were to sit down and quiz me and talk to me, "What do you want Truth Community Church to be known for? What would you like to see happen in the flock of God, the flock that belongs to Christ of which this church functions as an under shepherd?" Well, we'd want to say that the word of God was faithfully proclaimed, that the saints evidently loved each other as you do. We would want all of that to be true but there is something else. Just as Christ's death was supernatural in its peace and confidence in the Father, I would want our church to be known in years to come, that those people die well. They die well. They die without fear. They die trusting their Savior. They die confident of what lies beyond their final breath because that is supernatural. To approach death without fear, to be in the throes of your final breath and to be secure, to be confident, to be calm, to be serene. To die well. To be just like Christ. Our Lord Jesus leaned on his Father's mercy in his dying hour and said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

Beloved, that is the same privilege available to you and me that this perfect, final death of Christ takes away the fear of death for us. And just as our Lord said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," we can approach death with that same climactic, supernatural, vindicated trust that says, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." And I would want

our church to be marked by several things. One of the things I would want it to be marked by is by people who died like that, without fear because we knew Christ so well in this life that we knew that there could only be one final outcome for us: to depart from this life and enter into glory. You see, we have a settled peace based on a finished work and when our hour comes, we can trust him and say with our last breath, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," and then with our next breath, we find ourselves with our Lord. As Turretin said, "Resting from our labors and bathed in the greatest joys."

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Lord, what thanks can we render to you who did so much for us? How can we express sufficient gratitude for your bloody sweat in Gethsemane? The flowing blood from your body on the cross? How can we appropriately show appreciation for the fact that you bore the weight of our sins in your body on the cross? Every evil deed, every careless word, every wicked motion of our wretched hearts, placed upon you, punished there in full and then your resurrection to show that it was acceptable to God, our Father. Oh, to be identified with you in your death, burial and resurrection. Oh, to have our sins counted to someone else who could bear the punishment for them and to receive a righteousness not our own that would be acceptable to God. That's the great exchange of salvation: our sins upon you, your righteousness upon us. Received not by a work or a ritual that we do but through a simple faith that receives you and rests in you.

We thank you for the magnitude of salvation, stretching from eternity to eternity. And in your matchless omniscience by which you created the world, by which you sustain the world, by which you will bring this world to its conclusion according to your foreordained purpose, in the midst of the greatness of the surpassing purposes of your unsearchable great mind, you somehow saw fit to look on our meager souls and in mercy reach down and include us in the plan, to bear our sins on the cross, to be raised again for our justification, to ascend to heaven on high where you ever lived to make intercession for us, from where you one day will return for us and we will be with you not only today in paradise but for all of eternity. Such abundant grace poured out on unworthy sinners like us, O God, we magnify your name. We rest in the finished work of Christ. We thank you for the blessed assurance that that brings and of which we will now sing. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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