

God's Glory Through Christ's Death

Selected Scriptures

80-300

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, it is again our great, great joy to contemplate the cross of Christ. I was looking in Grace today and finding out that it was about 37 years ago that this church called us to come here and to serve the Lord. And during those many years, we have come to the table of the Lord many, many hundreds of times, and always with the challenge to speak with regard to the cross of Christ. And we have found it to an inexhaustible subject, and find it so again today.

I would like to look at the cross in a way that, perhaps, is a little different than we normally do. The hymns that we sung this morning, the song that we heard just now celebrate the meaning of the cross to us. And certainly, we cherish that, and it is right to celebrate it. But I want to look at the cross, not so much from our viewpoint, but from even a more important viewpoint, and that is from God's viewpoint, the glory of God in the death of Christ.

Our Lord said to Peter in John 21:19, that he would die as a martyr and that his death would glorify God. Peter did die as a martyr for the Gospel. History tells us that he was crucified and that he requested not to be crucified the way his Lord was crucified, for he was not worthy, but rather to be crucified upside down as a demonstration of his unworthiness.

His death was non-redemptive. His crucifixion was non-efficacious. His martyrdom was non-transferable. He died and in no way did his death provide anything redemptive for anybody else. And yet, it was said by the Lord Himself that by his death he would glorify God. Now if that is true of Peter's non-efficacious, non-redemptive, non-transferable death, then how much more is the death of Jesus Christ, a death that glorifies God?

And I want us to think about that as we meditate and devote our thoughts to the cross. In the issue of viewing the cross from the perspective of God, is not the usual way of thinking about it. We almost exclusively think of the cross in regard to our own lives, to its impact on us who believe. "Christ died for us," we say. "Christ died for us," we sing. He died for our salvation. He died for our eternal glory. He died to rescue us from judgment and Hell, and that is absolutely true. But that is only a byproduct.

That is only secondary. That is only a corollary to the fact that primarily He died for God. He died for God. Just to hear that statement, "Christ died for God," may be a bit new and cause wonder in our minds. And that in itself is a recognition that we haven't dealt with it, as we should have. If you'll open your Bible for a moment to Romans 11, that will provide for us a starting point in this meditation.

Romans 11 ends with a great doxology, Verses 33 to 36. In this, the inspired apostle burst into wondrous praise, Romans 11:33, he says, "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways. For who has

known the mind of the Lord or who became His counselor. For who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever, Amen."

My mind attaches itself to that phrase all things. From Him, through Him, to Him are all things. And I ask the question, "What are those things? What are all those things?" The answer is clear because this comes at the end of the 11 chapters. This is the response to the revelation of the prior 11 chapters, all of which discuss salvation.

This wonderful epistle begins with the Gospel of Christ that is the power unto salvation to all that believe, a Gospel which Paul is not ashamed to preach, and then which he goes on to explain in the 11 chapters. And at the end, all things related to that Gospel, all things related to salvation are from God, accomplished through God, and ultimately intended to be to God. He then is the source, the means, and the object of all redemptive work. Everything is for Him.

Paul says in Romans 1:5 that we have been given saving grace and apostleship, ministry to preach the Gospel so that people can obey it in faith for His namesake, for the glory of the ineffable name of God. In 3 John 7, it says that they went out for the sake of the name. At the end of Jude's wonderful little epistle celebrating the truth, finally, after talking about error we hear this benediction, "To the only God, our savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time, now and forever, Amen."

Everything points to God. Everything goes to His glory. And even from Jesus' own personal perspective, He came into the world -- He says in John 17:4, to glorify God. In John 7:18, He came seeking the glory and only the glory of one who sent him. In fact, in John 8:49, He said, "I do not seek My own glory." Everything He did was for God.

In the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John, Verse 27, as He anticipates the cross he says, "Now My soul has become troubled." It was not without a struggle that He did these things to the glory of God. "What shall I say? Father save me from this hour? But for this purpose, I came to this hour. Father, glorify thy name." He looks at the cross as the consummate way in which He will glorify the Father.

"There came, therefore, a voice out of Heaven. 'I have both glorified it and I will glorify it again.'" Jesus knew that His life was to be lived to the glory of God, and His death was to be died to the glory of God. Peter affirms this, 1 Peter 4:11, "In all things that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belongs to glory and the dominion forever and ever, Amen."

So as we come to the table of the Lord and think again about the cross, I want us to think carefully and accurately about the cross in a way that is, perhaps, not very often done. We think so much of what the cross means to us, and so little of what it meant to God. And in order for it to mean anything to us, it must mean everything to God. As this is understood, we really understand the cross.

Let me give you some things to think about. Number One, the death of Christ was a sacrifice to God, a sacrifice to God. Any look at the Old Testament will remind us of a very, very carefully revealed and demanded system of sacrifice. And all sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament were to be offered to God. To no other gods was any sacrifice ever to be made. To no person was any sacrifice ever to be offered. All offerings, all sacrifices were to be brought before God in the prescribed

location that God had revealed.

It was God then, who was the recipient of every single sacrifice, every offering. They were all for Him. They were to rise, as it were, to His nostrils, as sweet smelling savor, as incense to please Him. The offerer was guilty before God of sin. He was, therefore, subject to God's wrath. God had been offended. God had been dishonored, as He is by every sin committed by every person who's ever lived.

God provided a way in which the sinner could come before Him and for the moment temporarily have his sin dealt with. The offerer would come with an animal. And he would bring that animal to the priest at the tabernacle or at the temple. And his hands would be laid upon that animal as a symbol of transferring his sin and guilt to that animal.

The animal was then killed because God requires death for sin. The wages of sin is death. A soul that sins, dies. The animal would then be killed. The blood of the animal poured out all over the altar. And the offerer would be temporarily cleared by God. That animal could offer no permanent sacrifice, so it had to be repeated again and again and again and again. And the covering was only temporary.

But what they were learning was that God's wrath is deterred by a sacrifice, and a sacrifice offered to Him. This was all presenting a very clear picture of father time when a final sacrifice would come. Sometimes I think we miss the point and we assume that Jesus was a sacrifice to Jewish hatred or He was the sacrifice to Roman fear.

No, Jesus was a sacrifice to God, like every other sacrifice that pictured His full final sacrifice. He was an offering to God. And interestingly enough, He was both the priest and the offering. He was the true high priest. And He, at the same time, was the sacrifice. His offering was the full and final and acceptable sacrifice to God.

In the Book of Hebrews, this is laid out for us in very clear terms, Hebrews 7, we read in Verse 27, that He, unlike other human high priests does not need daily to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, as they did, and then for the sins of the people, because He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

Now just that little phrase, "He offered up Himself," to whom? To the Romans? To the Jews? To us? No. He offered up Himself. To whom? Look at Chapter 9. Chapter 9, Verse 26. Again, it says at the end of the verse, "He had been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

Verse 28, it says, having been offered once to bear the sins of many. To whom has He offered Himself? To whom has He rendered this sacrifice? Chapter 10, Verse 10 speaks again, of the offering of the body of Jesus Christ. Go back to Chapter 9, Verse 14, and we have the answer to the question.

It says in Verse 14, Hebrew 9, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit," here it is, "offered Himself without blemish to God, to God?" He offered himself to God because God required a sacrifice. Verse 22, Chapter 9, "Without the shedding of blood, there will be no forgiveness."

And it had to be the blood of a perfect sacrifice, Christ. Jesus dies as a sacrifice to God, as a sweet-smelling savor, finally once for all, never needing to be repeated again, God was pleased. Jesus was an offering, a sacrifice to God in His death. Secondly, the death of Christ was not only a sacrifice to God, it was a submission to God. It was a submission to God.

And these are in some ways connected and overlapping and consecutive. If you're in Chapter 10 of Hebrews or nearby Verse 5, will help us to grasp this. It talks about His sacrifice, here, after saying in Verse 4, "the blood of bulls and goats can't take away sin. They're only a picture of the one sacrifice that pleases God and can take away sin, namely the sacrifice of Christ."

But as He speaks about that sacrifice, borrowing language from the Old Testament Psalms, in Verse 5, He speaks about the fact that He came into the world for the purpose -- Verse 7 -- of doing the will of God. "He has come," he says, "as it is written in the roll of the book, to do thy will, oh God." Again, repeating the same things in Verse 8, that sacrifices and offerings from the past, to hold burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin are not what God desires.

He does not find pleasure in them. They're merely shadows under the law. "Behold," Verse 9, "I have come to do thy will," which takes away the old and replaces it with the new. He did what He did by the will of God, Verse 11, "By this will we have been sanctified to the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ once for all." The death of Christ was an act of obedience to God. That's critical for us.

That is critical for us. And I'll tell you why. It comes out in the language, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The horror of the cross is frankly a staggering, staggering reality. It is inconceivable for us to even grasp that level of submission which Jesus offered to his Father there. Let me sort of back up a little bit.

In John 4:34, He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who send Me and to accomplish His work." He said it again in John 10:18, essentially the same thing. "I do the will of my Father." His whole life was a life of obedience. His whole life was perfect. He did everything the Father wanted him to do. "I only do," He says, "what the Father do. I only do what the Father tells me to do. I only do that which the Father does."

He repeats that again and again and again, particularly in the Gospel of John. "I never do anything that would displease the Father." His whole life is an act of obedience to God. Theologians, through the years, have called that "His active obedience. His active obedience." From His birth and His first moment of consciousness, there was never any sin in Him nor could there be.

Always, at all levels, even with the limited understanding of a child, He obeyed God to whatever degree He understood that. His whole life was a life of complete and perfect obedience. We can't understand that because that was His delight to do the will of God. That's very different than receiving the wrath of God. As you know, He struggled with that.

In Luke 12:50 we remember a great, great struggle going on in His heart. "I have a baptism," He said. "I have an immersion, an experience to undergo. And how distressed I am until it is accomplished, and sweating great drops of blood." He didn't sweat great drops of blood before He got there.

In all of His life of obedience, there was never the agony of obedience that was wrought in His perfect soul that could match that of the cross. Theologians have called that His passive obedience, but we can easily misunderstand the use the word "passive."

It has not to do with passive as we think about something that just receives and doesn't act. It's rather passive from the Latin in the sense of passion. The obedience connected to his passion, to his sufferings. Now that's another kind of thing altogether for all eternity.

He had fully obeyed the Father on the side of righteousness, and that had been His delight forever. He had always been perfect righteousness and perfect holiness. But never had He had to receive a curse from the Father, bear all the weight of God's wrath on sin. And so His obedience at the cross is the more staggering and the more amazing act of obedience.

But when we talk about the active righteousness of Christ and the passive connection to His passion, those are just words. Those are just tools for us to use. And I don't want you to think Jesus lived this happy sort of delightful life of active obedience and then had to switch modes at the end and find some resource somewhere else to make it through the passion part.

No, even though there was a struggle there and there were other struggles in His life as He dealt with sin in the world all around Him. The horror of finding His Father's house being turned into a den of thieves was a struggle enough that unleashed His anger. Now this is not to divide Christ into two parts. These are not two modes of operation comes out of one and goes into another.

His life cannot be divided. His life is simultaneously always obedient actively and in that passive sense. His obedience to God and His perfect righteousness and perfect submission is always present. You can't divide Him. You can't divide His obedience any more than you can divide His person. His obedience is whole; it's complete.

He lives for God. He loves for God. He trusted in God. He worshiped God. All He did was in perfect compliance to the will of God, whether it was positive, or whether it was receiving that most negative, the wrath of God. In fact, it is this perfect righteousness, this flawless righteousness in all its fullness that we receive in salvation.

He was always fulfilling all righteousness in every way, actively, passively. He was always actively perfectly holy and obedient to God. And it is that which is credited to us. His entire life in every stage, every single moment was one whole life of obedience, perfect, unbroken obedience that is therefore the standard of perfection that puts us into a right relationship with God when that perfect life is credited to our account.

So even His living, as well as in His dying, there was efficacy for us. Even His living is vicarious in that it becomes the life that is credited to our account, just as is His obedience in death credited to our account. Why? Because it was a life lived in perfect submission to God by one who perfectly knows what God wills, for He is God.

And so when you look at the sacrifice of Christ, what you're seeing is a sacrifice made to God, an offering made to appease the wrath of God. What you're looking at when you look at the death of

Jesus Christ is a life of submission to the will of God so that God can affirm a perfect life. That is critical.

There has to be a perfect life that can be credited to our account, and it has to be one of us who lived it, thus, the incarnation. God had to be satisfied with His sacrifice and with his submission before it could ever be applied to us. Thirdly, the death of Christ was a substitution offered to God, a substitution.

The New Testament is so rich with this language. Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. He didn't die for His own sins. He had none. He was offered as a substitute for us. 2 Corinthians 5:14, "One died for all." 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made Him sin for us." 1 Peter 2:24, "He, Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed."

And that, of course, borrows language from that wonderful and beloved 53rd Chapter of Isaiah which says, "He was oppressed and afflicted." And for whom? Our griefs He, Himself bore. Our sorrows He carried. He was smitten of God and afflicted, pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our will befell on Him. By His scourging, we are healed.

The Lord caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. That's substitution. He takes our place. Peter says it this way, 1 Peter 3:18, "He died to just for the unjust." Christ died as a penal substitute. You have to understand that. God is absolutely holy. Sin is by definition a violation of God's law, which is a perfect expression of His holiness. Any violation of his law must be dealt with. All sin must be punished.

I'll go further. All sin will be punished. All sin is punished. There's no sin ever committed by anybody who's ever live in the history of this world that will not be punished. All sin will be punished, every sin in your life and mine and every life that's ever been or will be lived. All sin is punished.

God is absolutely holy, absolutely just, and sin is punished. It's punished. And on the cross, what you have is a penal punishment. You have God acting as a just lawgiver, giving a proper punishment for violation of that law. We have a little difficulty with that in our therapeutic culture. God determined that the penalty for sin, the just and right penalty for sin is death. That's what is required.

We live in a society where we're having a struggle to hold onto that. In therapeutic society, we think people ought to be put in prison for a couple of reasons, one because we want to get back at them for what they did to cause us pain. You hear these people who've had members of the family murdered, they come on the media and they say, "I hope that guy goes to prison and rots. I hope they electrocute him."

It's some kind of personal vengeance you want to reap on the head of somebody. Or we look at prison and jurist prudence as somehow putting people in some environment where they can get better. We see it as therapeutic. We see it as a way to sort of rehabilitate people. That's kind of the idea. And so if somebody's been on death row for 24 years but they've written a few children's books, we think they're a better person than they used to be, then what you want to do with that kind of person is let them out.

And we don't understand penalty. We don't understand that. We're losing that. We think about therapy. We think about personal vengeance. But we've lost the concept that you've got an absolute law and attached to that absolute law, even in a human society, our concomitant penalties that are structured to be equivalent in some way to the violation.

Jesus wasn't dying on the cross because of some personal vendetta by God. He wasn't dying on the cross because there was something therapeutic God was trying to achieve. He was dying on the cross because a penalty was required, a just penalty was required. That's what we have to recapture in this society that when you commit a crime, there is a penalty that is in some ways equal to the crime that must be given if law and justice is to be upheld. It's not about therapy and it's not about vengeance. It's about penalty

And the Old Testament is filled with the kinds of things that we should understand about what penalties would be given for what crimes, even the penalty of capital punishment. You say, "Well what about the person? Maybe they'll get better if you put them in jail." That isn't the point. It's not therapeutic. It's just penalty, a life for a life. God determined what the penalty was for sin. The penalty was death. And He executed that penalty on His son.

This is the great reality of substitution. It wasn't a personal vendetta, nor was it something therapeutic. It was penal. There was a death owed to justice, divine justice. I guess the staggering thing for me is this, Christ only suffered on the cross for about three hours, then He died. How is it possible that He could bear the full penalty for sin, for all who will ever believe, when if they had to bear it they would all spend eternity in Hell and it would never be enough?

Amazing, isn't it? If even an eternal Hell can't pay the penalty when endured by the sinner, how in the world can all the penalty for all who will ever believe be accomplished in three hours? The answer is, it was, which should take you somewhere into the realm of understanding the infinite punishment that Jesus endured. All the eternities of Hell that all the redeemed should have suffered were collectively endured by Christ in three hours.

He is infinite and He bore almost an infinity of wrath in three hours. The fury of God spent itself in three hours. Why? "This is My body which is given for you." It would take us forever and we still couldn't satisfy God. "This is My blood shed for you." He took the guilt of all our sins and the full fury of God's wrath as our penal substitute. It's the sacrifice of Christ, a sacrifice to God, a submission of Christ, a submission to the will of God.

It's a substitution of Christ, the substitute offered to God in our place, and leads, Number Four, to the fact that Christ's death was a satisfaction to God. It was a satisfaction to God. That's what it means when it says in the New Testament that He was the propitiation for our sins, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10, Romans 3:25. I'll use the word "propitiation." It's kind of an odd word. We don't use it much. But it means a satisfaction, basically, satisfaction. It was satisfaction. It was a way of saying God was satisfied.

The offering of Christ was enough and God was satisfied. God could never be satisfied with us until He was satisfied with His son. He could never be satisfied with taking us into His family until He was satisfied with His son being alienated. He couldn't reconcile us until He had alienated Him. But He was satisfied. He was the covering. He was the satisfaction. He placated the wrath of God fully. How

do we know that? It's all over the Scriptures.

Hebrews 1:3, "When He had made purification of sins at the cross. He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high." That's enough. How do we know that God was satisfied? Because He raised Him from the dead and because He took Him into glory and seated Him at His right hand. Understand this, that this is not a loving Christ trying to placate an angry God. This is not a loving son trying to appease an angry father. This is a loving God offering Himself as a sacrifice.

Do you understand that? It is important to get it and look at this way, when we talk about being saved, when we talk about being delivered, what are we saying? Saved from what? It's not really a saved from what. You say, "Well aren't we saved from sin? Aren't we saved from Hell?" In a sense, we are, of course. But even more importantly, we are being saved from God. We're saved from God by God through God. It is a loving, gracious, merciful, compassionate God who provides Himself as the substitute to bear the full fury of His judgment so that we can be saved from Him.

God sent His Son out of love to satisfy Himself that we would be saved from His wrath. And He suffered to the degree that He paid in full the price to satisfy God. And that's why our sins, as Psalm 103 says, "are moved as far as the east is from the west, buried in the depths of the deepest sea, remembered no more." And, "We're under no condemnation," Romans 8:1. Propitiation relates to God, His satisfaction, His being placated, His wrath being exhausted. So the removal of God's wrath is an act from God, by God, to God. Christ died as God, sent from God to satisfy God that sin had been paid for.

Another thing to think about, Number Five, Christ's death was a salvation to God, a salvation to God. That is to say when we were rescued, when we were delivered, it was to take us out of the Kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. It was for the purpose that we would belong to His glorious Kingdom. And this salvation can best be understood in this juncture in our thinking by understanding two words. We were redeemed and we were ransomed.

The word "redeemed" means to buy, to purchase. This was used a lot about slaves. You would redeem a slave. You would buy that slave's freedom. The word "ransom" we all understand. You have somebody, you hold that person. And for a price, you'll release them. The ransom price is given and paid and the person released. The New Testament talks about this. Jesus came in Matthew 20:28 to give His life a ransom. Who's the ransom paid to? Some people think it's paid to the Devil. It's not paid to the Devil.

It's God who destroys both soul and body in Hell. It's God who is the final adjudicator of every life. It's God who's the judge of the whole of humanity. The ransom price has to be paid to God. The redemption price is paid to God. And yet it's God, Himself, Acts 20:28, who purchases us with His own blood. In 1 Peter 1:18, we remember these wonderful words, "you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, but with precious blood, blood of the Lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

Romans 3:24, "We have redemption in Christ." Titus 2:14, "He redeemed us." 1 Timothy 2:6, "Christ came as a ransom for all." God set the price for our redemption, the price to ransom us, to buy us back. What was the price? Death. And it was through death that Christ paid the ransom. "He bore the curse," Galatians 3:13.

He took the curse to remove us from the curse. He paid the ransom price, and He paid it to God. His death was a sacrifice to God, an act of submission to God, a substitution that satisfied God, a salvation that paid the full ransom price to deliver us from sin to God. And finally, and there are many more, but for today, Christ's death was the means of our sonship with God.

This is about reconciliation. This is a way of saying that by being all five of those things Christ provides all that is necessary for us to become sons of God. God takes us into His most intimate relationship and fellowship as family. Romans 5:10, "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to do through the death of His son." Reconciled to do through the death of His son.

In Hebrews 2:9, we see Him being made a little while lower than the angels. "Jesus, through the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. Why? Verse 10, "to bring many sons to glory. And He's not ashamed to call them brothers." He died to bring the elect children of God into the family of God.

Colossians 1:20 said, "He reconciled us by making peace through the blood of his cross." Verse 21 and 22, "We were formerly alienated, but now we are reconciled through His death." Let me say it another way. We put a lot of emphasis today on the sinner's hostility to God. And we talk about the fact that sinners need to stop being hostile to God and angry with God and in enmity with God and at odds with God, and sometimes pictures God as some sort of happy, loving, benign kind of deity sitting up in Heaven just hoping people will stop hating Him, just hoping they'll stop being angry with Him or indifferent to Him, and that they'll start liking Him and loving Him.

That's not the good news. That's not the good news. The good news isn't that God is up there and He's really a lot nicer than you think he is and He'd really like it if you'd like Him. That isn't the good news. The good news is this, not that you don't need to be angry with God, but that God is no longer angry with you.

The good news is that God's hostility and anger and wrath and vengeance has been satisfied by the death of Christ, and all who believe are now welcome to come into His family. What Christ did on the cross was not designed to remove man's hostility to God or man's envy against God or man's hatred of God, but to remove God's hostility, hatred, and enmity with man. And the only reason we can even end our hostility and come by faith is because in a decisive act on the cross, God's hostility was ended for all who believe. The cross can't be anything to us until it's everything to God.

And we say with Paul, "May it be that I should never boast except in the cross of Christ, to boast accepting the cross of Christ."

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