Messiah's Ministry of Reconciliation
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Well as you know, this is the third night in our look at the promised Messiah, considering Jesus as Messiah. We are all familiar with the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and maybe not so familiar with what that means, to say that He is the Messiah. Let's go back and just kind of rethink how we sort of initiated our study.

When John and Andrew spent some time with Jesus when they first met Him after they left John the Baptist to follow Jesus, you will remember they followed Jesus and then they spent a day and a night with Him asking questions. It was John the Baptist who had declared that Jesus was the Lamb of God, was the Messiah, and they wanted to verify that so it was Andrew and John that spent many, many hours with Jesus. And when they completed their time with Him, they made this declaration, "We have found the Messiah." In fact, Andrew went to his brother, Simon Peter, to say to him, "We have found the Messiah." That's in John 1:41. There is no explanation by Andrew as to what that means, the Messiah, there's no question from Peter what does that mean because they all knew what it meant, the Messiah. It is a term that is used in very important ways in the New Testament, as well as the Old, to describe the coming of the Redeemer and the Savior. Simon Peter, later on in Matthew 16:16, spoke to Jesus and he said this, "You are the Messiah, You are the Messiah, Son of the living God." At His trial before He was executed, the High Priest confronted Jesus and he said to Him, "Tell us whether You are the Messiah, the Son of God."

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well near the village of Sychar, she said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming, He will declare all things to us." To which Jesus responded to her, "I who speak to you am He." So you have this dominant title "Messiah" that is being spoken about by all these people and even more, and incidents throughout the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus. The disciples, of course, declare Jesus to be the Messiah. The High Priest questioned whether He was the Messiah.

What does it mean to be the Messiah? Obviously the reality of the Messiah needed no explanation to any of those people living in Israel at the time, because they all were familiar with the Old Testament. They knew about the Messiah and what to expect. But for us, maybe we need to fill in a little bit of the background so that we have an understanding when we say, Jesus is the Messiah, we too can really identify the meaning of that term.

So, I've broken this into just three simple parts, the office of Messiah, the person of Messiah, and the ministry of Messiah, or the mission of Messiah. We started a couple of weeks ago with the office of Messiah. We said the word "Messiah" in Hebrew is the equivalent of the word *Christ* in the Greek; it's the same word, the same concept. But the Hebrew word "Messiah" means to smear oil on and it spoke of someone who is officially anointed. Who was anointed? Well, it was an official ceremony by which someone very particular and very specific and fulfilling a very special mediating role for God in the theocratic kingdom of Israel was identified. Kings were anointed. Priests were anointed. And prophets were anointed.

There were many messiahs in that sense, many anointed people in the Old Testament. Again, the priests were all anointed. The prophets were anointed. And the kings were anointed. And this was a ceremony, this was a sort of visual demonstration that they had been set apart by God to mediate for God. When I say mediate, I mean to act as a middle man between man and God. The king ruled for God among men. The prophets spoke for God to men and the priests provided the necessary intercession, the necessary sacrifice to bring man to God. They therefore all were mediators.

All of them were limited in their abilities, limited in their mediation. All of them were imperfect. All of them were sinful. But the promise of the Old Testament is that there would come one who would not just be a king and not just be a prophet, and not just be a priest, but be the perfect King, the perfect Prophet, and the perfect Priest. He would be *the* anointed One, *the* Mediator. As a prophet, He would speak for God. As a king He would rule for God. And as a priest, He would redeem for God. That is why we call these offices mediating offices because they stand between men and God. So that's the office of Messiah. And we covered that a couple of weeks ago, as you know.

And that brings up the question, all right, we understand the office, this is the ultimate, final, perfect, sinless, ultimate, consummate King, Prophet, Priest, Mediator who does it all. Who is this?

Well, that is the question the Jews asked through all their history, as the prophecies of the Messiah unfolded and are now recorded for us in the Old Testament. They ask the same question, "Who is it? Who is it? Who is it of whom the prophets speak?" Even in 1 Peter chapter 1 there's a notation that the prophets looked into what they wrote to see what person and what time they were writing about as they waited for the Messiah. By the time you get down to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, Messianic anticipation has maybe reached its apex for a number of reasons that I may explain to you a little bit later. But who is going to be the Messiah--the ultimate, consummate, perfect Mediator?

That takes us, secondly, to what we looked at last time and that's the person of Messiah. What kind of person does it have to be to take this role? To be the perfect Mediator between God and man, the person must be fully God to represent God, and fully man to represent man. Fully God to take God's role and God's place; fully man to take man's place. The Old Testament laid out the details of this person, even telling us something about the family and the line and the very event by which the

person would arrive. And we looked at that last week and we said the genetic line, the genealogy for this person that will be that Messiah, starts with Eve and goes from Eve through her son, Seth, and goes through Seth to Noah and through Noah to his son, Shem, and through Shem to Abraham, and through Abraham to Isaac and through Isaac to Jacob and through Jacob to Judah, and through Judah, the tribe of Judah to a man named Jesse and through Jesse to David. A Messiah then will be a son of Abraham and a son of David. From Abraham will be His lineage. From David will be His royal right to rule.

How will the world know, as we ask the question, when the son of David arrives? David had many sons, and many grandsons, and great-grandsons, and great-great-grandsons. And as history flowed for hundreds and hundreds of years beyond David, there were many who were in the line of David. How would we know when the right son of David who was also David's Lord arrived? And it fell to Isaiah to tell us how because in Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14 we read that very remarkable promise, prophetic promise of God, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign, you'll know." How will we know? "A virgin will be with child and bear a Son and she will call His name Immanuel. A virgin will be with child and bear a Son and call His name Immanuel." When we come to the New Testament, we know exactly who that is because in the first chapter of Matthew we read that the angel says, concerning the birth of Jesus, speaking of Mary, "She will bear a Son and you shall call His name Jesus for He will save His people from their sins. Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means 'God with us.'" The angel even quotes Isaiah 7:14.

So how do we know when the Messiah, the Son of David, in the line of David, will arrive? A virgin will have a child and call His name Immanuel. That has never happened in human history before, the birth of Christ, and has never happened since the birth of Christ. It is impossible.

And when He was born He is the Son of David but He is David's Lord. He is the Son of Mary, but He is Mary's Lord and Savior. He is the Son of Abraham, but He said, "Before Abraham was, I am." He was born after John the Baptist and yet He existed before John the Baptist. He is Immanuel, God with us. This is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that identification of His office and person is unmistakable and brings us to His mission, His ministry. What did He do to mediate? What did He do?

Well, we know in the declaration of the angel that His name was to be Jesus, "Jehovah saves," for He will save His people from their sins. He comes to redeem His people. He is the anointed, mediating Redeemer. He will bring the truth of redemption. He will offer the sacrifice that redeems and He will gather into His eternal kingdom all those who belong to Him. But what does He do to mediate? What does He do to reconcile sinners? We now have come all the way down to the ministry of Jesus as Messiah. His goal is to reveal Himself and to gather His people to reign over them. His goal is to give

them the revelation that brings them to the knowledge of Himself that He may gather them into His presence forever and ever. But in order to gather His people, He has to first reconcile His people. So we could say, as a king He reigns, as a prophet He reveals, but necessarily as a priest, He reconciles, He reconciles.

Yes He came to bring the Word of God. Yes He came to rule as God. But He cannot bring the Word of God to the hearts and minds of people and He cannot rule over them unless they are reconciled. So His primary ministry is the ministry of reconciliation. That is why Jesus said this in Luke 19:10, “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost.” His ministry is a saving ministry. It is a saving ministry. Those He reconciles to God will receive the full understanding of His revelation. Those He reconciles to God will receive the eternal blessing of His reign. Before sinners can obey His truth, before sinners can enjoy His reign and rule, they must be reconciled to God. So while He is the perfect and consummate and ultimate king and prophet, His mission is necessarily priestly, His mission is necessarily priestly. He must make to God an acceptable sacrifice for sin. And there hasn’t been one yet.

What about all the animals that were sacrificed throughout all of the history of the sacrificial system, going all the way back to the fourth chapter of Genesis, none of those animals could provide salvation. None of those animals could provide atonement. None of them could reconcile a sinner to God. They only pointed to the fact that one would come who would offer a full and final sacrifice. Yes, Jesus is the Prophet who reveals. Yes, He is the King who reigns. But His mission the first time He came was as a priest to provide a sacrifice. What priests did, as you well know, was in the Temple bring the sacrifices of the people before God and ask God that the people who were truly penitent would be forgiven. But none of those sacrifices actually took away their sin. They only symbolized the one, true and final sacrifice that could and did. It so happens that He is not only the priest who offers the sacrifice, but He’s the sacrifice as well. He is the sacrifice as well. He will save His people from their sins. But He will do that by offering Himself to God as a sacrifice.

Did the Old Testament expect this? Yes, the Old Testament clearly expected this. In Genesis 3:21 when Adam and Eve are aware of their sin and their nakedness, God kills the first animal, takes the skin of that animal and covers them, covers their nakedness, covers their shame.

In the fourth chapter of Genesis, God asks for offerings to be brought to Him. Cain and Abel bring their offerings. Abel brings the proper offering, an animal sacrifice. God must have given that instruction. Cain brings the fruit of his labors from the ground and God accepts Abel’s sacrifice. Cain is jealous and kills Abel. But the sacrifice of an animal, a substitute life, an innocent substitute life, is established.

In Genesis chapter 22 you have Abraham taking Isaac up to the mountain and God tells him, “Take Isaac up there and sacrifice Isaac, put him on the altar.” Isaac is the child of promise, as you well

know, that God gave to a barren Abraham and Sarah to fulfill the covenant of Genesis 12 repeated later on. And everything that Abraham is promised lies in the life of Isaac and yet God tells Abraham to kill Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice. But in Genesis chapter 22, you know the incredible story, as an obedient Abraham goes there believing that if he has to sacrifice Isaac, God will raise him from the dead, the Lord provides for him. Genesis 22:13, “Abraham raised his eyes, looked and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son”...“in the place of his son.” And there we’re introduced to the substitutionary atonement in very clear and graphic terms.

In Exodus chapter 12, we talked a little bit about that this morning, a Passover lamb is slaughtered and the blood sprinkled on the door. And where that is done, the angel of death passes by. In Leviticus chapters 1 to 7 you have a series of offerings that are given, sin offering, trespass offering, guilt offering, they all involve the sacrifice of animals. And it’s explained in the seventeenth chapter of Leviticus and verse 11, and this is...this is a passage of Scripture with which you should be familiar because it sort of pulls everything together, Leviticus 17. I’ll read you the whole verse. Verse 11, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.” Atonement then clearly stated to be in the blood, in the death of an animal as a substitute. But as I say, the blood of bulls and goats can’t take away sin, that’s what the New Testament says. In fact, God even condemned their sacrifices and their offerings because their hearts weren’t right. We pointed that out to you this morning.

So the Old Testament anticipates that salvation comes through a substitutionary sacrifice offered to God as an atonement. It really becomes crystal clear in Isaiah 53, crystal clear in that amazing chapter and we spent ten weeks going through that unparalleled prophetic treatment of the Lord Jesus Christ. But let me remind you of it. Speaking of Him, starting in verse 4, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, our sorrows He carried.” Who is He? The servant of Jehovah, the slave of Jehovah, the Messiah, so designated from chapter 42 to 53. The whole chapter’s about Him--42, 49, chapter 50, chapter 53. This is the Servant, My Servant, the Servant of Jehovah identified in 52:13, and about Him it is said, “Our griefs see Himself bore, our sorrows He carried. We ourselves esteemed Him, stricken, smitten of God and afflicted but He was pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our wellbeing fell upon Him and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” Verse 10, “The Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief if He would render Himself as a guilt offering.”

So the Messiah will be the one who dies in the place of His people. He will not only be the priest who makes the offering, He will Himself be the offering. Reconciliation then comes through a substitutionary, vicarious atonement of an acceptable, final sacrifice. And that is why John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God. And they would know what that meant. Everybody brought their lamb

and God had a Lamb, the lambs that the people chose and brought couldn't finally take away sin, but God's Lamb could.

Just to enrich that a little bit, and this could be a little dangerous because there's so much here, but turn to Hebrews 9. Hebrews can be a bit of a daunting book, going through it and trying to grasp everything that's being said. And the reason it's a bit challenging is because we're not as familiar as we should be with the Old Testament patterns of the priesthood and the temple. But as we come to understand those, this book opens up. In Hebrews chapter 9, we could pick it up at verse 11, "When Christ appeared as a high priest," so He is the ultimate, anointed priest of the good things to come. He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say not of this creation, and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood He entered the holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption. On the Day of Atonement, a priest would come. He would sacrifice an animal. He would take the blood of that animal. He would go into the Holy of Holies and he would sprinkle that blood on the Mercy Seat, the *hilasterion,* to propitiate God for the nation, for the people. Jesus is the High Priest of a greater and more perfect tabernacle, more than that early temple, and He doesn't offer God the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood He enters the Holy Place and He only has to do it once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. That is necessary. Verse 13, "If the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ who, through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." If there was benefit, temporal benefit to a temporal sacrifice, how much eternal benefit is there to the sacrifice of Christ. He then becomes, verse 15, *the* Mediator, *the* Mediator, the Reconciler, the Anointed One, the Messiah of a new covenant that provides the redemption of the transgressions going all the way back under the first covenant. In other words, the death of Christ is the sacrifice that saved the people who lived before Christ, as well as those after--before Christ and after, salvation is based solely and only on His sacrifice.

Down in verse 27, chapter 9, "In as much as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, Messiah, so Messiah also having been offered once to bear the sin of many." The "once" is critical because I told you this morning that Josephus says as many as a quarter of a million lambs would be sacrificed at one Passover, whether that number's exaggerated or not, the lowest imaginable number might be twenty-five to fifty thousand. And that was done every year, century after century, after century, going forward from the Passover. But Christ dies once--once to bear the sin of many and appears a second time only for salvation to those who eagerly await for Him. In other words, He only makes one sacrifice at His first coming; He will appear a second time to bring us into the fullness of salvation in His presence.

The word *Christ* is repeated in this chapter over and over and you need to remind yourself, it is the word *Messiah*. In chapter 10, verse 4, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away

sins. Therefore when He comes into the world, He says sacrifice an offering you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for Me. In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure, then I said, ‘Behold, I have come. In the scroll of the book it is written to me to do Your will, O God.’” Jesus says I’m the one who will offer the sacrifice that satisfies You.

Verse 8, “Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have not desired, nor have you taken pleasure in them which are offered according to the Law.” But God is never finally satisfied by them. He is not propitiated. Then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” And then verse 10, “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once”...“once for all.” Again the “once” is the emphasis here.

Incalculable thousands upon thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of animals had been slain. None of them could atone for sin. They simply pointed to the fact that a sufficient, acceptable, satisfying sacrifice had to be given but none ever was until that day on the cross of Calvary.

Now why did the Messiah have to die? Why did He have to die on the cross? The Jews didn’t expect that even though the Old Testament portrayed it again and again and again and they demonstrated it every day of their life when they sent to the morning sacrifice, and the evening sacrifice that occurred daily, daily through the whole calendar year. It wasn’t just on Passover or Day of Atonement. Even though it was so clear that God required a sacrifice, why didn’t they get it? Because sinners want to believe that they have within themselves the goodness that can satisfy God. And so every system of religion in the world but the truth of Christianity and the gospel believes in human works.

And the Jews certainly did. Turn to Romans chapter 3. Paul has to correct that. Here is why the Messiah had to be more than a prophet who spoke the Word of God and more than a king who ruled for God. He had to be a priest who offered a sacrifice because in Romans chapter 3 we read that they were entrusted the oracles of God. But they didn’t believe. They didn’t believe. And that left them in a hopeless situation. They were the same as Gentiles, verse 9. Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. And both of them are summed up here and all of this is taken from the Old Testament, “There is none righteous, not even one, there’s none who understands, there’s none who seeks after God. They’ve all turned aside, together they become useless. There’s none who does good, there’s not even one. Their throat is an open grave, their tongues keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

That’s enough to give a psychologist nightmares. What a diagnosis of the human condition. “We know that whatever the Law says it speaks to those who are under the Law,” verse 19, “so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God,” verse 20, “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.” No one can be saved by the Law. The Law is

holy, just and good, as represented in the Mosaic prescriptions that were given to Moses in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. It is the Law of God. It is a reflection of His nature. It is holy, just and good. But by means of keeping that Law, no one can be reconciled to God at all.

Why? Let's look at Galatians 3 for a moment. We're trying to demonstrate why Christ had to die and we're making the point that sinners cannot be reconciled by doing good, by keeping the Law of God. That's what Romans 3:20 said, "By the deeds of the Law, no flesh will be justified"--made right with God. You come in to Galatians 3, verse 10, "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse." If you try to come to God by being moral and being righteous, and being religious, and being good, you're under a curse. Why? Because "cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the Law to perform them." That's taken right out of Deuteronomy 27. If you don't keep the Law perfectly, it curses you, it curses you. Paul, who was blameless, according externally to the Law, Paul who was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, who was zealous for every aspect of Judaism, who was kosher, who dotted all his I's and crossed all his T's, says that when I really saw the Law of God, it killed me. It slew me. Verse 11, "No one is justified by the Law before God." "No one is justified by the Law before God"--no one. You cannot be reconciled to God by keeping His Law. The Jews believed they could be, as every other religion does.

But here's the problem. The Law requires behavior that is contrary to human nature. If human nature is defined in Romans 3, if that's how humans work and function, then keeping the holy Law of God is contrary to their nature. Furthermore the Law demands the impossible. It demands perfect adherence to the Law, not only externally but internally, not only on the outside, but in the heart. You not only don't murder, Jesus said, you don't hate. You not only don't commit adultery, you don't lust. That's what the Law demands. The Law mandates perfect performance. And the Law refuses to accept good intentions, noble motives. The Law refuses to accept effort, a good try. The law is also unrelenting. There are no days off, none. You keep it perfectly every day, every moment of your life--it never changes.

And then the Law demands the severest penalty. You're cursed, headed for death, both physical, spiritual and eternal. And the Law gives you no help. The Law has no power to help you. There's no power in the Law. The Law listens to no repentance. The Law gives no second chances. The Law doesn't balance the good against the bad. The Law therefore holds out no hope of salvation, no hope of forgiveness, no hope of reconciliation. In fact, the Law doesn't stir up righteousness. The Law stirs up...What?...Sin stirs up sin.

Go back to Romans 3 and you will be reminded of that. At the end of verse 20, "Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." It just exposes how corrupt you are. So now, thinking back to Galatians where we were, this is the problem. What's the solution? Verse 13 of Galatians 3; one of the great verses in all of Scripture. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law." He redeemed us from the curse of the Law. How did He do it? "Having become a curse for us." That's vicarious, substitutionary

atonement. He took our place. He's not only the priest that makes the offering, He's the offering as well.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law. How? Having become a curse for us. It is written again from Deuteronomy 21, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." Now you can go back to Romans 3 again and verse 21. "Now apart from the Law, the righteousness of God has been manifest. It is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ." It is through faith in the one who offered Himself, who took the curse for us that salvation comes.

Verse 25 says that God displayed publicly His blood as a propitiation, that means a satisfaction. God was never satisfied with any bloodshed until the blood of Christ ran out of His veins and He gave His life. A man is justified, verse 28 says, by faith in Christ. That becomes the theme of the New Testament gospel. That's the mission of Messiah. Why did He come? He came that He might be a curse. He came that He might be the sacrifice for sinners that satisfies God.

Any understanding of Christ other than that will not save, cannot save. It must be that we understand that we have been redeemed. I love the words of Peter. "Not with perishable things like silver, gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb unblemished and spotless." And the next verse, verse 20, "He was foreordained before the foundation of the world." He is the Anointed One. Yes, He is a king; yes, He is a prophet; but His mission in His first coming is to be a priest, provide for us the sacrifice that God accepts.

Now you know this, but this is another way to see it in the context of Messiah. The passage of Scripture that I always go to, to give the purest explanation of this mediating work of Christ, is 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and I want to take you there. Although you are familiar with it, it is a marvelous and necessary portion of Scripture for our consideration, 2 Corinthians 5:18 to 21. And I'm not going to dwell on it as we have many times in the past, but simply to put it in the context that we're talking about.

Verse 18, we'll start there, "All these things," all what things? All the things that have to do with salvation, with being in Messiah, verse 17, the new things that come, all the elements of salvation, verse 18, "are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the Word of reconciliation. Therefore we're ambassadors for Christ as though God were making an appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

As far as explaining the gospel and the role that we play with that gospel in the world, there's no passage that exceeds this one. Five times the word "reconcile" appears in some form in the words I just read from 18 to 21. Actually 18 down through 19 you have the word "reconcile" four times and once in verse 20. This is about being reconciled to God. And that's what a mediator does. That's what Messiah does. You will notice references to Christ, the Messiah, in verse 14, to Messiah in verse 16, to Messiah in verse 17, Messiah in verse 18, Messiah in verse 19, and Messiah in verse 20 a couple of times. Again, every time you see the word "Christ," that's the word "Messiah." This is the function of Messiah. Messiah is a reconciler.

How does He reconcile? By providing a sacrifice, by providing *the* sacrifice that satisfies God, by taking the sinner's place, taking the curse on Himself and receiving the full punishment. The whole of the church's role in the world is defined here at the end of verse 18 as the ministry of reconciliation. What do we do in the world? We tell people they can be reconciled to God. We tell them they can be reconciled to God. That's our message. At the end of verse 19, that's called "the word of reconciliation," or the message of reconciliation. So we have a ministry in the world and our ministry is the ministry of reconciliation and that ministry is really fulfilled when we preach the Word of reconciliation or the message about reconciliation. That's why we're here in the world.

And what is that message? That message is this: that God is a reconciler and God reconciles sinners to Himself through Christ, verse 18. He reconciles sinners to Himself through His Messiah, so that's the purpose of Messiah in His priestly role. He is the mediator who comes between man and God and dies as God and therefore conquers death and as man and therefore is punished in man's place.

This is our calling, verse 20. We are ambassadors. What do we do? We go through the world begging people to be reconciled to God. How? By putting faith in Jesus Christ. People cannot be reconciled to God through keeping the Law, can't do it. The Law curses, the Law condemns, the Law damns, the Law kills eternally. But we have been given a ministry of reconciliation to proclaim the message of reconciliation that God, verse 19--here's the heart of it--"is reconciling the world to Himself." How? By not counting their trespasses against them.

How can He do that? How can God not count trespasses against sinners who are guilty? That's the big issue. Every sin that's ever been committed in the history of the world will be punished, every single one. Divine justice demands it. How then can God punish every single sin committed by every single person and save people? He has to punish someone else for their sin. And that's what He did when He punished Christ as His Lamb.

People ask the question: How is it possible for Jesus in a three-hour period of darkness on the cross to absorb the punishment for all the sins of all the people who would ever believe in the history of the world when if they went to hell, in an eternity in hell, they couldn't atone for their own sins? How can He do it in three hours? And the answer is, Because He's an infinite person. And the other answer is,

Because people in hell keep sinning forever. Jesus took our place and God didn't count our trespasses against us. That is explained in verse 21 in the fifteen Greek words, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." "He made Him who knew no sin"...Who is that?...Jesus Christ, the spotless, unblemished lamb; He made Him to be sin. What does that mean? He became a sinner? No, it means He treated Him as if He had committed all the sins of all the people who will ever believe in human history. He treated Jesus as if He had committed your sins and my sins and the sins of all His people. He didn't commit any of them, but He treated Him as if He did. That's what substitutionary punishment means. He punished Him in a cosmic, massive, incalculable, incomprehensible way so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The way to understand that is on the cross God treats Jesus as a sinner so He can treat you as a saint. I'll say it another way. On the cross, God treats Jesus as if He lived your life so He can treat you as if you lived His life.

There's a sense in which--and that's what verse 21 is saying--there's a sense in which both His life and death were vicarious. I don't want you to miss that. Both His life and death were vicarious. He is the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He lived and died as a mediator. He lived and died as a reconciler. He lived and died for the sins of His people, from Adam to the last person to be saved in human history. And He had to live a perfect life as well as die a substitutionary death. If He hadn't lived a perfect life, He could not have died an unblemished lamb. He could not have been God's Lamb. He could not have been the one mediating, acceptable sacrifice to satisfy God if He hadn't lived a perfect life. So He was, according to Galatians 4:4, made under the Law. And He lived in perfect conformity to the Law, and He's the only person who ever did. I just read you from Hebrews where He said, "I came to do Your will, O God." And that's all He ever did. He was not exempt from keeping the Law. He actually learned obedience, as He grew in wisdom, stature, favor with God and man. "He learned obedience from His suffering," the writer of Hebrews says.

So when we talk about the righteousness of God in Him in verse 21, that is imputed to us, our sin imputed to Him on the cross, His righteousness imputed to us, we're not simply talking about His eternal righteousness. I'm going to split some theological hairs here. This righteousness is not simply the eternal righteousness that belonged to Him as God, but rather it is the righteousness that He demonstrated living as a man--the righteousness that He literally earned every moment that He lived in perfect compliance, in action and attitude, in deed and thought, to the Law of God. He was obedient, Philippians 2 says, all the way to the point of death. Great statement.

God justly imputed or another way to say that would be regarded Adam's sin to apply to the human race. We know that as in Adam all died. God justly imparted...imputed, I should say...or regarded Adam's sin to apply to the whole human race because the whole human race was in Adam. And so He justly imputes or regards Christ's obedience to apply to all who believe in Him. Adam's

disobedience was not confined only to Adam; it spread to all who were in Adam. And so Christ's obedience was not confined to Christ; it spreads to all who are in Christ. This is the great truth of the gospel. Sinners may be forgiven because Christ satisfied the full demands of the Law in His life and paid the full penalty for sinners violations of that Law in His death. His death is for us and His life is for us. He receives the guilt for our sins and the punishment, and we receive His righteousness. God looks at the cross; He sees us. God looks at us; He sees Christ.

That's how God can be just and the justifier of sins, by the substitutionary priestly work of the Mediator, the Messiah, Jesus, So in the Old Testament, or the New, speaks of Messiah as righteous, it is not pointing to His eternal righteousness, it is pointing to His manifest, active, obedient righteousness that He lived out on earth. Theologians like to distinguish between His passive righteousness as He suffers on the cross, and His active righteousness as He lives a perfect life. Both His active and passive obedience are affirmed by God in one event, and what is that event? How did God affirm the perfection of Christ? By raising Him from the dead, by raising Him from the dead. In Romans chapter 1, verse 4, "He is declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus, Messiah, our Lord." Prior, verse 3, "He was a descendant of David according to the flesh, but He was the Son of God with power affirmed by the resurrection from the dead to be Jesus, Messiah, Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship, among whom you have been called as well."

The resurrection then, affirms Messiah's identity, office, person, and ministry. His atonement, His exaltation, His authority, His intercession for us in heaven all affirm the perfection of His substitutionary death, which was the capstone on a perfectly righteous life. He had to live that righteous life so that it could be credited to our account. He had to die that obedient death so He could be punished in our place.

With all of that in mind, then we can say together we have found the Messiah, right? We have found the Messiah. The Old Testament declares that the Messiah, the Mediator, the Reconciler, the Redeemer, the Savior will come. He will be the seed of a woman, a man without a human father. He will be a son of Seth, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, David. He will be identified by being virgin born. And He will be born in a city associated with David, called Bethlehem, and the one who is born in Bethlehem, says Micah 5:2, will be an eternal being, an eternal being.

He will arrive, according to Daniel 9, 483 years after the decree of Artaxerxes, which puts Him right in the very time when Jesus came. He will be preceded by a prophet and a herald, according to Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3. He will speak the Word of God as a prophet, Deuteronomy 18. He will be a worker of miracles. You say, "Is that in the Old Testament?" Absolutely! He will come; He will be a worker of miracles, unmistakably so in the words of Isaiah chapter 35, "The eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, the lame will leap like a deer, the tongue of the mute will shout for joy." He will be a miracle worker. He will enter into Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey,

Zechariah 9:9.

He will be the slave of Jehovah, doing Jehovah's will. Isaiah 42 to 53, He will be anointed by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 42, Isaiah 61. He will be despised and rejected, Isaiah 53. He will suffer crucifixion, Psalm 22 describes crucifixion. Isaiah 53 describes crucifixion. Zechariah 12, that He will be pierced.

He will save His people by being their substitute, Isaiah 53. He will rise from the dead, Psalm 16, Isaiah 53. He will become a light to the Jews and the nations, Isaiah 49, Isaiah 61. He will be exalted as king, Psalm 2, Psalm 110, and many other places.

What the Old Testament says about the Messiah is clear and very, very specific. So I read the words of Isaiah 41, "Present your case," the Lord says, "bring forward your strong arguments. The king of Jacob says, let them bring forth and declare to us what's going to take place. As for the former events, declare what they were." He's saying, "All right, you false gods, you tell the future, you predict the future. Declare the things that are going to come afterward that we may know you are God's. Indeed, tell us the future. Behold, you are of no account and your work amounts to nothing and anybody who chooses you is an abomination. False gods can't tell the future. Only the true God would lay out so many details."

So ask the question, Who was Jewish? Who was a direct descendant of David? Whose public ministry began about 483 years after the Babylonian captivity of the Jews? Who was born in Bethlehem? Who was born of a virgin? Who claimed to be the Son of God? Whose coming was preceded by a powerful messenger preaching repentance? Who was renowned for His wisdom, His teaching, His power, His righteousness? Who performed miracles? Who entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey being proclaimed king? Who was scourged, beaten, spit on, pierced, hated, despised, tortured, killed? Who was pierced, crucified? Who was numbered with the criminals? Who died in the place of sinners? Who was buried in a rich man's tomb? Whose clothing was distributed by the casting of lots? Who rose from the dead and became a light--salvation to the world?

That's the case. There's only one answer and that's the Messiah, Jesus our Lord. In John 10, and I'll close here, John 10, maybe we can just look at verse 24, the Jews gathered around Him and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You're the Messiah, tell us plainly." It's enough to make you pull your hair out. What? Where's the suspense? Where's the suspense? Could you go back over the list I just gave? What is the suspense? Could You tell us plainly?

Jesus answered them, "I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you're not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me and I give them eternal life. They will never perish and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of My hand. I and the Father are one." The Jews picked up stones again to

stone Him.

Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father, for which of them are you stoning Me?” The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy and because You being a man make Yourself out to be God.”

He was God and proved it. And the proof has been there ever since, and it’s still there today, isn’t it? How long will you keep us in suspense? If You’re the Messiah, tell us plainly. How much plainer can it be?

They were after Him, verse 39, seeking to seize Him and He eluded their grasp. And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was first baptizing and He was staying there. Many came to Him and were saying, while John performed no sign, yet everything John said about this Man was true, many believed in Him there.

That’s wonderful. We’re part of that group, aren’t we? But the world is still posing a question that has been long ago answered, If You’re the Messiah, tell us plainly. How much more plain can it be?

Father, again it’s been a wonderful day of fellowship and blessing, we thank You for it. Do your work in hearts, we pray, in Christ’s name. Amen.

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