

The True Meaning of the Cross

by David Ravenhill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the true meaning of the cross and how it relates to our lives, highlighting the significance of the cross as God's solution to man's sickness and the purpose of creation.

Duration: 1:08:55

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, James 4:13-17, 2 Peter 2:1-3

Topics: "The Cross", "Surrender"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the true reason for Jesus Christ's death on the cross. It highlights the need to surrender our lives completely to God, not just seeking forgiveness for sins but also giving Him full ownership and authority over our lives. The message challenges believers to align their will with God's will, acknowledging Him as Lord and Master, and living in accordance with His plans and purposes.

Transcript

Well, thank you for coming out on this sort of stormy night. It's been a joy to be with you up here in North Dakota. I don't get up these parts very often.

I want to talk to you tonight on the very center, the very core, the very crux of our Christian life. I want to speak to you about the cross. I think there is so much misunderstanding when it comes to the reason that Jesus Christ died.

Now, you may look at me and say, you know, we didn't come all this way to hear a message about the death of Christ. We've known that ever since we were sort of a knee-high to a grasshopper. You know, that's basic to our faith.

And yet I am convinced after 50 years of ministry that the church really doesn't understand the reason that Jesus Christ died. We want to look at the reason what the Hebrews talks about our salvation as being so great a salvation. So great a salvation.

In other words, the scope of what Jesus Christ has done will never ever be fully understood this side of eternity. And we have different words that are used in the process, if you like, of our salvation. One of them that we are most familiar with, of course, is the word justification.

Justification is a legal term that is taken from the law courts. But justification is not sufficient to, again, describe the vastness and the greatness of what God has done for us. And so we have the word propitiation, which is a spiritual term that's taken from the temple.

We have the word reconciliation, which is a social term taken from society. We have the word adoption. But we also have the word redemption.

And the word redemption is a commercial term that's taken from the business world. And that is the aspect of the cross that I want to focus on tonight. Now, when we talk about the cross, the cross really is God's medicine for man's sickness.

Let me say that again. The cross is God's medicine for man's sickness. Man's sickness, of course, is sin, selfishness, and so on.

If I were to come down in the morning, God forbid, with some sort of ailment, maybe a hacking cold, a blinding headache, runny nose, and just watery eyes, and so on and so forth, hacking and coughing and so on, and pastor says, listen, we need to get you some sort of medication. In fact, I have a doctor that lives just down the road here, and he's a good friend of mine. And so he calls me up to the doctor, and the doctor checks me over, gives me a prescription.

And I take that prescription three times a day for the next ten days, maybe some sort of penicillin or whatever. At the end of that period of time, I still have the same symptoms. Blinding headache, runny nose, you know, all stuffed up, aches and pains throughout my body and so on.

I'm going to come to the conclusion that Pastor Mark's friend is not the best doctor in the world. Either that, or he misdiagnosed my condition and prescribed the wrong medication, or the medication came in from China. And it is not what it should be.

In other words, there is something wrong with that medication, because if that medication truly works, I should be free from all my symptoms. Isn't that right? In other words, I would say to people, if somebody said to me, how are you feeling? I'd say, you know, I'm feeling like my old self again. I have my strength back, my energy back, my eyes are no longer watering, I no longer have a blinding headache, my joints feel great and so on, I'm being totally restored.

That is what the cross is supposed to do. The cross, again, is God's medicine for man's sickness. Now the problem is, what does man look like when he's healthy? That is what we have to know, first of all.

Let me put it this way, here's another illustration. If this podium was taken apart, let's say it's, you know, a little more fancy than this, we'll take it out of some Baptist church, you know, with these great big ornate podiums, and I take it all apart, every single piece of wood, take it out to a carpenter's shop. He has not seen it in its original condition, but I take in all these plants, all these pieces of wood, and I say to him, would you mind restoring this for me? I come back in ten days, I'm surprised because instead of a podium, there is a toolbox or maybe a coffee table or maybe a bookshelf, maybe a side table, maybe even a casket.

And I look in horror and say, but listen, that was a podium that came out of a church. And he said, but you never told me. You never told me what it was.

Originally, I did the best job I could. I think that's what we've done with the message of the cross. We've done the best job we could because we failed to understand God's original plan in place.

You see, you can never restore something to its original condition unless, first of all, you see it in its original condition. Isn't that right? And when you see it in its original condition, then you know what that restoration is supposed to accomplish. It's supposed to bring it back to the way it was originally.

And so that's what we're going to explore for a little while. But I want to begin in the epistle of John. We're going to be looking at a number of scriptures, so bear with me.

The first epistle of John, chapter 2 and verse 12, 13, and 14. John says, I've written to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. I've written to you, fathers, because you know Him that is from the beginning.

I've written to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I've written to you, children, because you know the Father. I've written to you, fathers, because you know Him that is from the beginning.

I've written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you've overcome the evil one. John is not literally addressing the various age groups in the church. In other words, he's not writing a letter to the Sunday school department, and then a letter to the youth department, and then a letter to the AARP crowd.

He is addressing three levels of spiritual maturity. How many of you know you can be a baby in Christ and be 99 years of age physically? Or you can be a mature man or woman of God at the age of 20. So it has nothing to do with our physical age, but John is saying here, I'm writing to you, children, those that are just born again of the Spirit of God.

In fact, he says, I write to you, children, because your sins are being forgiven. That's where the Christian life begins, the realization I'm a sinner. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse me and restore me and so on.

And then as a child, of course, he says, I've written to you, children, because you know the Father. A child in the natural, if he's born into a healthy home, comes into a relationship with his Father. The same thing is true spiritually.

We have a relationship with God. We cry, Daddy, Abba, Father. And so he begins here by saying, we all began as children.

The wonderful thing about a child is it has no past. Some of you may have children at home, or maybe they're here. Maybe some of you got grandchildren.

If that baby, let's say there's a little three-day-old baby, and it is screaming its head off in the middle of the night, and Mother goes in, honor to whom honor is due, Father's a tone deaf at night time. Amen. Thank God for honesty here, or I'm not a poor waiter.

But if that baby could articulate what it is feeling, and the mother walks in and that baby is able to express itself, the mother would never hear that baby say, Mommy, the reason I'm crying and screaming my head off tonight is because of all those horrendous things I did years ago. They've come back to haunt me.

Another wonderful thing about a child is it has no past.

If any man be in Christ, all things are passed away. Every single thing becomes new. And so he begins to talk here about little children.

As wonderful as a child is, if that child remains a child, it is one of the greatest tragedies that a parent can face. Isn't that right? And Paul faced that. He said to the Corinthians, you know, I've got to give you the bottle all the time.

I'd love to take you out to the outback. My translation. I know what the outback is.

I don't think there is one here. Or anywhere close by. But anyway, that's another matter.

But in other words, he said that, you know, you should be able to digest a good steak, but instead you need the bottle. And so if we develop the way God intended us to develop, we become young men or, if you like, young ladies. And he says, I write to you young men, because you've overcome the evil one.

It isn't too long after we're born again to the Spirit of God, we begin to mature. We realize we have an adversary. That adversary is out to sabotage, if you like, everything that God has done in our life, to undermine the grace of God and so on and so forth.

And we've got to learn to overcome the evil one. And so he says, I've written to you young men, he repeats it twice, because you're strong, the Word of God abides in you, you've overcome the evil one. If I were to put that in what I think is a more logical sequence, I would put it this way.

I've written to you young men because the Word of God abides in you. Because the Word of God abides in you, you're strong. Because you're strong, you can overcome the evil one.

He's not talking here about physical strength. He's not talking about these young men that are working down at the gym and, you know, expanding their physique and so on. He says you are strong because the Word of God abides in you.

Because you know who you are in Christ, you're able to overcome the evil one. And then he says, I write to your fathers. I write to your fathers, he says, because you know Him that is from the beginning.

And then he writes again, verse 14, and he says the very same thing. I've written to your fathers because you know Him that is from the beginning. I have to admit that for many, many years I was sort of disappointed somewhat in John's revelation here.

He is, if you write, if you plot this on a graph, I write to you children, your sins are forgiven. You know the Father, I write to you young men, you're strong, the Word of God abides in you, you've overcome the evil one. I write to you fathers because you know Him that is from the beginning.

In other words, what's the difference between knowing Him that is from the beginning and children that know the Father? He seems to be saying the same thing, he's sort of a little redundant. Well, there's a vast difference, of course, between the way children know a father and the way fathers know Him that is from the beginning. Those of you who are parents know that you exist for your child's sake.

Isn't that right? Daddy do this, Daddy do that, Daddy buy me an ice cream, Daddy push me on the swing, Daddy read me a story, Mommy, when's dinner going to be ready, and so on and so forth. Yes, darling,

what can I do for you next? And as the child grows up, the toys get more expensive. Daddy, I'm off to college, I need a Honda.

Sorry, Chevy. And I'll put it in the culture here. But, you know, we live and we look at our father from a very selfish point of view.

Daddy, you're there to take care of my needs. And thank God that, of course, Daddy is there to take care of my needs, but not only that. But he says, I've written to you fathers because you know Him that is from the beginning.

Fathers see the big picture. If I were to take one word to describe these three levels, the first word would be the word conversion or regeneration, because they'd be born again, I write to you children. The second word would be maturation, because they've begun to develop and flex their spiritual muscles and take care of the enemy, resist the enemy.

They're strong, the word of God abides in them, they become mature. But if I were to describe this little statement here, I write to you fathers because you know Him that is from the beginning, I would use the word consummation or culmination. In other words, a father sees the big picture, he sees the overall plan.

Fathers, children live in the immediate realm, don't they? You give them a toy, they're happy, brother or sister takes it away, they're bursting in tears and so on, maybe they're fighting with each other. You know, father comes in with a little bit of discipline and so on, he's thinking big term, he thinks if I don't do something about this rebellion that's going on, there's going to be a greater problem down the road. And so he's constantly thinking of the big picture.

And I've said all of that to get to this one word, the word beginning. The word beginning. The beginning of things gives you a totally different perspective.

Isn't that right? And John, more than any other writer, talks about the beginning of things. He begins his epistle, what was from the beginning? What we've heard and seen, our hands are tangled. He begins the gospel, in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.

He gave us the book of Revelation. And he talks about Jesus Christ being the Alpha, the Omega, the beginning and the end. And John uses this word beginning, as far as I know, more than any other writer like I just said.

But the beginning of things is what we need to understand. The beginning of things gives us a totally different perspective. Let me give you an illustration.

Jesus is standing in front of the scribes and the Pharisees. They were always trying to embroil him in some sort of controversy, you know, should we pay taxes to Caesar or not, and all of these sort of things. And on this occasion, of course, they raise the issue of divorce.

And they say, listen, you know, even Moses gave us permission to divorce our lives, and, you know, what do you say about it? And Jesus took it out of the present situation, and he went back to the beginning, and he says, in the beginning, it was never God's intent. You see, the beginning gives us a totally different perspective. Divorce came in because of your inability to forgive, because of your hardness of heart, and so on and so forth.

And so Moses was given permission to allow you to divorce your wife for the sake of peace because you weren't big enough and man enough to forgive and forget, and so on and so forth. But in the beginning, it was not so. Now, if we're going to understand the cross, we need to go back to the beginning.

In other words, man is sick now. Man is full of sin and selfishness and rebellion and so on. But what was man like originally? Because that is where we need to get back to.

So let's go to the book of beginnings, if you will. And that is the book of Genesis. And I want to look at man in his original condition.

You see, from Genesis chapter 3 on, we live in a distorted world. The Bible calls it a crooked and perverse generation. In other words, it's like looking through somebody else's glasses, and they've got a different prescription than you, and so everything's sort of out of the kilter, everything's a little fuzzy, and so on.

You're not seeing things clearly. From Genesis 3, everything in the Bible, again, is distorted. Why? Because the fall took place.

And even though this countryside is beautiful, you know, it wasn't this way originally. There were no thorns and thistles and so on and so forth. You know, it was radically different.

But man was radically different, too. And so let's look at the way God planned man to be. In Genesis chapter 2, and verse 15.

And the Lord God took the man and placed him, or put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it. Let me break that verse down for you into three words. The word submission, the word location, and the word vocation.

First of all, the word submission. The Lord God took the man. Notice that it's God, not just simply in a generic way, but God as Lord, as Master.

And he has total control over his creation. Again, there's no fall, there's no rebellion. The enemy has not been sort of let loose and so on.

This is man in his pristine condition, and he is subservient, totally subservient, to God as his Lord. So much so that the Lord took the man. No rebellion, no objection.

We don't have heel marks all across the garden of Eden where God says, I'm bigger than you, and man says, I really don't want to do this, and God says, you've got to do it. No, man is completely compliant, completely submissive to God himself. The second thing is that God placed man in a location.

In this case, he put him in the garden of Eden. God had a place that he intended man to function. He did not give man a personality test.

He doesn't give man options and say, listen, I'm going to give you a few little tests here, and if you happen to have a green thumb, why do I ever have a garden? It is magnificent, it's got fruit trees and roses and every conceivable thing. You'll be just absolutely delighted. It's a horticultural paradise.

On the other hand, if you're sort of artsy, I'll give you a digital camera and some oil paints and I've got this villa down on the beach and the sunsets are magnificent, but we'll see how the test comes out. God says, this is where I want you. And in that location, he reveals his location.

This is what I want you to do. You're there to serve my interests. I place you here because I have a job for you to fulfill, a mandate.

Now that was man originally. That's man before he got sick. I hope you're understanding where I'm coming from now.

This is man in his original condition before he got a headache, if you like, because of sin and watery eyes and aches and pains and all the things that sin brings to us, so to speak. This is man originally. Now we're going to try and explore this for a few more minutes.

If you turn with me to the book of Colossians, and what we're doing now is trying to get into the mind of God as it pertains to the beginning of things. Let me say that again. We're trying to get into the mind of God now as to his original intention, his original purpose.

So Colossians chapter 1, verse 16, For by him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, rulers or authorities. All things are being created by him. Let me pause there.

Most of us don't have a problem with that. Most of us embrace the fact that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth. We don't buy into Darwinism.

We don't believe that we evolved out of some little slime ball, you know, 10 million, 20 million years ago, whatever. We believe that God created the heavens and the earth. Almost every page of the Bible tells us that.

And most of us don't have a problem with that. Because it's sort of out there. It's just a sort of a general statement.

But notice that Paul says something else. Not only were all things created by him, but all things were created for him. That changes things.

Now I realize that everything that God created was created specifically for himself. That includes your life and my life. We're not here by chance.

We didn't just sort of evolve, so to speak. And, you know, there's no purpose for my life. And so on and on.

All things were created by him and for him. That little phrase at the end there, for him, changes everything, doesn't it? It makes it personal. It makes it a challenge to each and every one of us.

Then we go to the book of Revelation again. We're just touching on a few verses here. Revelation chapter 4. Used to be a song that we sang years ago.

Revelation 4 and verse 11. Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things. Once again, a declaration that God is the creator.

And because of thy will they existed and they were created. The King James says, and for your pleasure they were created. In other words, God created the earth for his pleasure, for his will.

He didn't, he wasn't just sort of bored one day and decided, you know, I'll do something. You know, just spoke the world into being, gave it a good spin and said, you know, I'll check back with you 6,000 years

from now. In fact, no, God had something in mind.

He created man again for fellowship, for relationship, for his pleasure, for his will, for his purpose. Hebrews chapter 2, verse 10. For it was fitting for him, speaking of Christ, for it was fitting for him, for whom are all things, oh sorry, yes, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory.

So, let me just go back. It was fitting for him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things. Let me put that in the order of these other verses.

It was fitting for him, through whom are all things. In other words, everything came into being by him and then for whom are all things. So, God created everything again for himself.

That's important that we understand that. Now, let's go to the book of Romans. Everybody knows, I'm sure, if you've been saved any length of time, you know Romans 12, verse 1. It's the verse that I think most of us end up memorizing or hearing so often.

I could teach you there for forever, no matter the verses of God, you present your body, your living sacrifice and so on. How many of you know the verse preceding that? Most people don't, but it is the link, it's the foundation of Romans 12, verse 1. Keep in mind, originally, there were no chapter divisions, no verses here, so let me read verse 36 of Romans 11. For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever. Amen. Because there's an amen there, I think whoever was dividing the chapter up that day, thought he'd have a coffee break and come back and start a new chapter.

I don't know. You know, chapter divisions were not inspired. They were put in by some monk or monkey somewhere back in history and help us to sort of navigate and get around, but this is one of the worst chapter divisions in the Bible.

This is one of Paul's greatest revelations. He said everything comes from God. From him are all things.

Not most things. All things come from God. So he is the creator of all things.

Not only is he the creator of all things, he is the sustainer of all things because in him we live, we move, we have our very being. So it is from him, it is through him that you and I live. The very breath that we breathe and so on is given to us by God.

So it is from him, through him, and then Paul says, therefore to him are all things. In other words, everything belongs to him. If it came from him, if he sustains it, then he is also the consummator.

He is the creator, he is the sustainer, he is the consummator of all things. This is one of Paul's greatest revelations I personally believe in. I believe everything that he taught, all of his theology obviously was God-given, but it stems from that sort of revelation.

Everything comes from God. Everything is sustained by God. Everything belongs to God.

Therefore, I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to give back to God that which came from him, that which is sustained by him, that which belongs to him, as your reasonable offering of worship. See, Romans 12 doesn't make sense without it. Once you've got that foundation, that revelation, the least you

can do, Paul says, if everything came from him, everything is sustained by him, everything belongs to him, the least you can do is give back to him what he owns.

You go into 1 Corinthians chapter 8, and Paul says the same thing. Verse 6, Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for him. One Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through him.

Paul mixes it up a little bit, but nevertheless it's the same thing. It is from him, through him, and for him. You see, Paul can't get away from this sort of revelation.

It's something that sort of permeated who he was and who he taught. He had that revelation. Now, we've got into the mind of God now for a little while, I trust, and we've begun to understand God had a plan.

Everything was created by him and for him. Now, the problem is the enemy came along. As we well know, the enemy deceived Eve into believing that she was better off doing her own thing, basically.

Isaiah summarizes our condition, every single one of us, this way Isaiah 53 and verse 6, all we like sheep have gone astray. We've gone astray from God's original plan, God's original order. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We've turned everyone to his own way, his own way as opposed to God's way. And the essence of all sin is selfishness. Isn't that right? The foundation of every single sin is selfishness.

And we learn it from the, almost from the get-go. The moment you are born, almost literally, that little hard drive begins to get programmed. Here a baby comes, emerges out of the womb, it's been in hibernation for nine months, and in the darkness comes out into the marvelous light sort of thing, and all of a sudden, it's surrounded by a fan club.

Uncles and uncles, brothers and sisters, if there are any and so on, everybody's doing it, isn't she cute, isn't he cute, can I have a hold and so on, let's assume it's a home birth, and this baby thinks, wow, this is amazing, everybody loves me, thinks I'm the greatest, and so on and so forth. And after being passed around for a little while, that baby gets exhausted, and mother puts the baby in the back room, turns off the light, baby's all swaddled up, it wakes up about an hour later, two hours later, thinks, I'm back in the womb, I'm all swaddled up, it's dark in here, where's my fan club, let's have a battle. All of a sudden, the fan club arrives, the music begins, the rocking chair is dragged out, and so on, and the baby thinks, ah, I get it, all I've got to do is ring the bell, and I get attention.

And so, you know, here it is, middle of the night now, the baby's not hungry, the baby's not wet, but the baby's missing all the attention in the fan club. So again, let's have a battle, and mother goes running in, to train up her mother in the way she should go, and when she's old, she'll have to pop out. And so, that baby learns to get its way, and we're all like that.

We learn to, you know, con our way into getting the biggest piece of cake, and getting out and doing the dishes, and blaming our brother or sister if we've got them, and we develop a selfish lifestyle. What's in it for me? What's in it for me? The problem with that selfish lifestyle is that when it comes to the cross, what's in it for me? What has Jesus Christ done whereby I can benefit? After all, my whole life has been about selfishness, about my feelings, and so on and so forth, so there's got to be something in this whereby I can benefit. And of course, the message comes, Jesus Christ died on the cross for you, David, for you, Mary, for you, Tom, so that you don't have to go to hell.

You can go to heaven. That sounds pretty good. I like that.

I don't want to go to hell. Doesn't sound like the best place to spend eternity, so, you know, I'll volunteer, you know. And that basically becomes the message of the gospel.

And yet, really, it's a very man-centered view of the cross, isn't it? Now, I'm going to give you an illustration. I've used it for many years, but I will back this up in a moment with a number of scriptures so that you can see this is not just an illustration. It is rooted and grounded, hopefully, in the Word of God.

Let's suppose that my wife and I are going to be married for one year. We celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary last year, so this is purely an illustration. And let's suppose that when we got married, we had a number of debts.

And we sat down together, and we said, listen, as soon as we get married, we are going to do everything we can to pay off all the debts. And I get two jobs, and my wife gets two jobs. We live a very Spartan sort of lifestyle.

We do without transport. We are part of some sort of carpool. We don't need our own car.

And we live as simply as we can. We don't go out to eat and so on. Every penny we make, we put into paying off our debt.

We come to the end of our first year of marriage, and we have been successful. We paid off every single debt. We don't have a single debt.

In fact, we now have \$1,000 in the bank. We are finally in the black, out in the red, and into the black. And I say to my wife, let's go out and celebrate.

And so she said, that would be great. We haven't eaten at all all year. And I say, well, McDonald's sounds pretty good.

But anyway, we sit down, have a meal, and I say to her, darling, wouldn't it be great if we could have our own car? I mean, we've gone an entire year without a car. We've been relying upon people to pick us up and take us to church and so on, and they've been great about it. But imagine the liberty we would have, the things we could do if we had our own car.

And she says, darling, we are not going back into debt. You promised me that we would not go back into debt. And I say, well, listen, we've got \$1,000.

She said, you think you can buy a car for \$1,000? I said, yeah. I said, I think I can get a car for \$1,000. She said, okay, if you think you can buy a car for \$1,000, you go ahead, but not one penny more.

I said, okay, this is my department, you pray, and so she goes into the closet to pray, and I scatter around all the used car places, and finally I stumble across an old car, 20-plus years old, body seems to be in pretty good condition even though it's filthy. Runs smoothly, and so I buy the car, \$995. \$5 left over for gas.

I drive that car home. Now let's also assume by way of illustration that my wife and I during that year together, we've established a reputation in the little community we live in. We are known as Mr. and Mrs. Clean.

Everything about our lives is immaculate. Even though we don't have much, the wards are always beautifully manicured, the windows are always windexed, you come in and the floors are highly polished and everything is neat and squeaky clean and so on. We have that reputation.

It's gone around the community. There's Mr. and Mrs. Clean. And I drive home in this filthy car, and I drive it around the back of the house, and I immediately get a great big five-gallon bucket of water, fill it with soap and water and plenty of suds, and I begin washing that car.

It takes me quite a while to get all the muck and mire and dirt and everything off it, and after I do that, there's still some residue of things, and so I take some solvents and some rags and I remove, again, all the residue that is not budged by the water. After that, I come and polish it. And after about three or four hours of work, that car begins to take on a brand-new appearance.

It looks like showroom condition. The luster comes back in the paint. I do all the homework and so on.

But I don't stop there. I tackle the inside of the car. I'm a fanatic.

I vacuum it. I take the seats out. I shampoo the rugs and the carpets and, you know, do all the armor, all the dash and take the upholstery cleaner and do all the upholstery and so on.

Not only that, I skim-clean the engine, vacuum out the trunk, and by the end of the day, that car doesn't have a trace, not even a smidgen, as our president would say, of dirt on it. The car is clean. It's immaculate.

And then I go into the house and I take into the house with me all the filth that I've taken from that car. I mean, I've got dirty rags. I've got paper towels.

I've got sponges. I've got a bucket of absolutely filthy water. I've got a vacuum cleaner.

I dump all the contents of a vacuum cleaner out of the canister. Here's this great big, huge pile of dust. And then I call my wife from Britain.

And I say, Darling, come in with it quick, quick, quick. I'm all enthusiastic. And I say, Look at what we got for a thousand dollars.

I bet you never dreamed your prayers would be that effective. Look at all this dirt. I mean, there's got to be 80 acres of dirt there.

Look, you know, she said, Darling, don't do that. We've got a reputation. Stop that.

What are you doing? I said, well, look, if we got all of that for a thousand dollars, aren't you impressed? And she looks at me and she says, Do you feel alive? You told me you were going to buy a car. Now, what was the reason for my payment? Why did I spend my entire life's savings? Was it to get a car, or was it because I relished all the dirt? You see, we've made the atonement about the dirt. And about the car.

Yes, the car got clean. But that was not my intention. My intention was I had need of a car.

I went to purchase a car. Because I missed a clean, that car had to come up to my standard. Because my reputation is at stake.

If I drive around in a filthy car, people are going to say, Hey, you know, that guy doesn't really mean that, you know what he says. Look at the car he drives. No, that car has to represent me.

It's an extension of who I am. Therefore, it has to be holy, if you like, as I am holy. But what I'm really interested in is the car, and not the dirt.

In fact, I'm going to get rid of the dirt as soon as I can. The dirt is going to go out in the garbage. The dirt is going to be flushed down the drain.

And God does the same thing. He's not interested in your dirt. My Bible says, as soon as He gets your dirt, your sin, He takes it as far from the East as from the West.

In another place, it says He buries it in the depths of the sea. He doesn't relish your dirt. He's of purer eyes than to behold iniquity in the Bible.

Isn't that right? Your sin cannot do anything that is beneficial to the Kingdom of God. Your sin cannot testify. Your sin cannot prophesy.

Your sin cannot teach a Sunday school class. Your sin has no value and therefore God gets rid of your sin. You see, God does not have a sin collection in Heaven.

I don't know how many of you are into collecting baseball cards or something like that or stamps or coins or whatever. You know, God doesn't have a sin collection. He doesn't have these great big leather volumes that every once in a while when there's peace on Earth, He brings one out and He says to His angels, see that one there? There's only two of those in the whole world and I got both of them.

See this one there? This is the rarest sin that was ever committed back in the 15th century by an old man up in the mountains of Tibet and I've got it. And this one here, I've been after this for years. I just got it on eBay the other night.

God is not into collecting sin. He's not interested in your sin in that sense. Your sin again has no value.

What He is interested in is getting back what He created. Now let's look at some scriptures. Hopefully I've got your attention there.

Romans chapter 14. All of these verses deal with the atonement, deal with the cross. Romans 14 verse 7, 8 and 9. For not one of us lives for himself, not one of us dies for himself.

If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Let me say that again. Whether you're alive or dead, we are the Lord's. For to this end, that's important, underline it.

For to this end, for this reason, Christ died. That's a very important message. For this reason Christ died.

That He might, and lived again, that He might be Lord of the dead and the living. Now notice my Bible does not say for this reason Christ died and lived again, that He might be Savior of the dead and the living. Yes, He is Savior, but He's also Lord.

Remember in the beginning it was the Lord God. Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. If we confess with our mouth Jesus Christ as Savior, no, as Lord, we shall be saved.

You see, we don't want the Lordship side because that infringes on my selfishness. I don't want anybody telling me what to do. And so we sort of maneuver the scriptures around and repackage it and reshape it and so on.

Then it loses all of its power. But He died in order that He might be the Lord. The book of Titus.

Find the book of Timothy. Titus chapter 2 and verse 14. Let me back up to verse 13.

Looking for the Blessed Pope and the appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed. Let me pause there for a moment. He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed.

We have here a cross. Imagine, if you like, the left side of the cross represents what God has done for man. The right side of the cross represents what God gets out of the cross, so to speak.

This is the side of the cross we're familiar with. He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us or cleanse us or free us from every lawless deed. Sin is a transgression of the law.

In other words, on this side of the cross, this is the side of the cross we are familiar with. Jesus Christ died to take away my sin. I come as a sinner.

I see Jesus Christ as my Savior. I ask Him for forgiveness. I repent of my sin.

And immediately, I'm taken out of the kingdom of darkness, brought into the kingdom of God's dear Son. I have peace with God. I have the peace of God.

I'm reconciled with God, and so on. We are familiar with that because 99% of us, I'm sure, in this room have experienced that. But notice what it says here.

Paul goes on to say, He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession. You see, what the blood cleanses on this side of the cross, the blood claims on this side of the cross. Let me say that again.

What the blood cleanses on this side of the cross, the blood claims on this side of the cross. He gave Himself for us, thank God He did, in order that He may have for Himself a people. In other words, He was after the car, not the dirt.

For His own possession. God wants you as His own. Why? He created you for Himself.

And He redeemed you for Himself. It's important that we understand that. He wants to purify for Himself a people for His own possession.

Let's look at another verse. 2 Corinthians 5. Again, all of these Scriptures deal with the reason that Jesus Christ died. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 15.

He died for all. The day who live should no longer live for themselves. Alright, now here we're getting to the very core, if you like, of why Jesus Christ died.

He died for everyone. But He died that those who live, and that's most of you, a few of you on your way out. The day who live should no longer live for themselves.

In other words, prior to the cross, I live for myself. Oh, we like sheep of chemistry. We've turned everyone to His own way.

I live for myself. I make my own decisions. I use my money the way I want to use it.

I did whatever I wanted to do. But the Bible says when Jesus Christ comes into your life, that whole aspect of life is to change. We should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him.

But for Him. Who died and rose again on our behalf. In other words, the cross is to revolutionize our reason for living.

We're not in this world just for self-gratification here. We're in this world now for the pleasure of God. Jesus said, I do only do the things that please the Father.

Paul says, I have as my ambition, whether at home or abroad, to be pleasing to Him. Isn't that right? Now let's go to the book of Revelation. If I haven't convinced you so far, this one will.

I hope. Revelation chapter 5. John sees the Lamb standing as if slain. And then he sees the great choir of heaven, if you like, begin to erupt in song.

Verse 9, And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book and to break its seals. For thou was slain. Speaking about the death of Christ, it's His death on the cross.

Let me read it again. They sang a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book and to break its seals. For thou was slain and didst purchase for God.

That's important. Purchase for God with thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. What was it that He purchased? Men.

And who did He purchase men for? For God. You see, the cross really is not about you. It's about God.

It was God's means of bringing men back. The Father wanted to restore the prodigals. Man had been deceived and went his own way and Trinity came up with a plan.

The Son, I'll go, I'll give my life, and so on. And I will bring them back to the Father's house. And so Jesus came and He shed His blood.

Again, He purchased for God with His blood men from every tribe and tongue and nation. Yes, they were washed. Yes, they were set free from sin and so on.

But the ultimate purpose was God was looking for a people in Him. Because of the fall and because of His deception of the enemy and so on, man was led astray. But the cross again is to restore us back to God Himself.

To reconcile us to God. So that once again we are in God's property. We belong to Him.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 6. While you're turning to that, let me give you a brief testimony. I was raised in a Christian home. Some of you are familiar with my father's ministry.

My father was a hellfire preacher at times. These days we don't ever mention hell. But I know there is one. I was dangled over it more than once. Felt those flames. But I refused to accept Christ.

Oh, I never went into any gross sin. I often thought of applying to a Guinness Book of Records. You know, I never smoked a cigarette in my life.

Not that that's the world's greatest sin. Never did drugs in my life. Never drank alcohol in my life.

Never slept with anybody outside of marriage in my life. Never went to a dance in my life. And so on and so forth.

You know, I was the epitome of perfection. Good preacher's kid. Yeah.

But I was a sinner. And I knew I was a sinner because my father made that very real through the preaching of the Word of God. I was a self-righteous sinner.

The worst sort of sinner that you can have. But I also had one longing in life and that was to go into the field of graphics. I had two brothers, an older brother, a younger brother, and a middle child.

And they were gifted academically. They had straight A's every time, you know, the report cards came home. My brother sort of aced everything.

They were the top of the class. I was always the one that supported them. Gotta have a foundation somewhere.

And I brought home F's on my report card. I struggled all the way through school. I just hated school.

But I excelled when it came to art. I always got straight A's in art. And I wanted to go into the field of graphics.

That's what I had. My brothers didn't have that ability. And so it gave me a sense of feeling that I had some sort of value.

They were gifted one way. I was gifted another way. And I could not wait to get out of school and go into the realm of graphics.

And from the age of about 14, around 13, 14, God began to deal with me. Now I may have accepted Christ as a child. I have a very poor recollection of things in my early years for some reason.

But when I became of age in the sense of understanding the gospel, I began to resist the call of God. And years went by, age 14, 15, 16, 17, until finally at the age of 18, I'd made my way forward. And I knelt at the altar.

Prior to that, I would literally shake under conviction of sins hundreds of times. Not even able to hold a hymn book when they were saying, you know, just as I am or whatever it is. Knowing God was wanting to draw me to Himself and refusing.

Oh, did I want to be saved? Yes, I wanted to be saved on my terms. I wanted to have peace with God. I knew there was the hell.

I knew I was going there. And I wanted to make sure that I had the assurance of salvation, that I had peace with God. But I also wanted it on my terms.

You see, I had plans. I had dreams. I had goals.

And God was not going to interfere with them. Finally, at the age of 18, I came forward in a meeting with Bethany. Knelt down.

Long before anybody came to talk to me or counsel me, my prayer was something like this, Lord, you know that I'm a sinner. I began to confess whatever sins I could think of. But I said this to Lord.

I said, Lord, I am not just here to give you my sin. I'm here to give you my life. And Lord, I give you everything all my plans, all my goals, all my dreams, all my ambitions.

I lay it at your feet. Here I am. Take it.

You see, I'm convinced that in the average church, 90%, if it's an evangelical church, 99% of the people claim to be born again. They've given God their sin. But I would also say that 90% of them have failed to give God their life.

There's a big difference. There is a big difference. We give God our sin.

We want to be cleaned up, but we still continue to do our own thing and go our own way. And we have a salvation based on man's terms, from man's viewpoint, instead of understanding what God really accomplished there on the cross. He purchased a people for himself.

I went home the next day, or the next day rather, and I opened my Bible, and my eyes came to this portion of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 6, verse 19 and 20. Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorifying God in your body. I want you to look at that verse.

Do you not know that your body... You see, God is after a body. He's after a car. It's not your sin.

It's your body that God wants. Your body is now my house, my property, my temple, whom you have from God, and you are no longer your own. You have been bought.

In other words, everything that we own, we've purchased, or as it was a gift. Isn't that right? There is an exchange that takes place whereby, because of the payment, that thing becomes yours. It's your property.

And if I were to take that from you, what am I doing? I'm stealing. Every pastor here knows that when the coffers get low, we dust off Malachi, will a man rob God? But you've robbed me. How will we rob you? In tithes and offerings.

There's a far greater robbery than that. We've not only withheld our tithes and our offerings, we've held the greatest offering ourselves. We were purchased, and yet we've refused to give God the goods.

Imagine if I went into a store, maybe I want to buy my wife something. I've been away for several days, and I want to purchase something, and I see a little piece of jewelry, maybe \$40 or something, and I take out my credit card, and I said, I'll take that. And the lady said, well, just a minute.

She puts it back in the counter, and I think, well, this is a piece that she has on show. She's going to get a piece from the back. I get the receipt for the credit card, and the lady comes back, but I see her down at the counter there helping somebody else.

And I think, well, that's so strange. Maybe she's had to order it in from the warehouse or something at the back, and, you know, nothing happens for a while, and I see her helping somebody else, and finally I go, and I take my receipt, and I say, listen, I just purchased this. That piece of jewelry.

Remember, I just purchased it. I mean, I've got proof that I purchased it. She shrugs her shoulders and says, hey, you're in North Dakota now.

I mean, you know, none of us would tolerate that. We would, you know, demand purchase. We would go to the manager.

If the manager doesn't cooperate, we'd go to the police or whatever, you know, depending on the value of the thing, we'd make a law case out of it. We want that which is rightfully ours. We paid for it.

It belongs to us. Jesus Christ paid for you. Not just for your sin, but for you.

Your body belongs here. You're not your own. You're being bought with a price.

Therefore, glorify God in your body. It's all about you. It's not about your sin.

It's about you. That's what God created. He created you for himself.

He's a body now who's prepared for me. I know that's taken out of context, but in another way it isn't taken out of context. Because we are the body of Christ.

Isn't that right? Let me take you to two other scriptures, and then we'll close. 2 Peter. This is a frightening verse in many ways.

2 Peter 2. And verse 1. But false prophets arose among the people. Now, I was never very good at English grammar, even though I've got six or seven books there that I've written. Thank God for editors and so on.

But I do know this. That's past tense. False prophets arose.

It's already happened. It's past tense. Just as there will be false teachers among you.

What is that? Future. In other words, Peter is making a prophetic statement. We have had a problem in the past with false prophets, but I am warning you, look out because in the days to come, false teaching will come into the church.

And he says, these false teachers will come among you, and they will secretly introduce destructive heresies. In other words, these teachers will come in, and they will start teaching things that are destructive. You could put in there, I think, to the kingdom of God, to the purpose of God.

Now, when something is done secretly, you're unaware of it. My wife and I were missionaries in New Guinea in 1971 and 2. And we had had a number of situations. Our car had been stolen, and we made sure at nighttime that we locked our house.

Our house was built up on sort of concrete pylons, partly to be free from snakes and also to allow a little bit of circulation with no air conditioning. And it was about 100 degrees most days and high humidity, and it was just sweltering hot. And a lady, just two doors down, or maybe it was next door now, I can't quite remember, but she'd been raped.

And our car, like I said, had been stolen. So we made sure that the doors were locked every night. We had two little girls at the time.

And I woke up one morning, walked into the living room, and I noticed the front door was wide open. And I was flabbergasted. I thought, that's impossible.

I remember locking that door, and then, you know, your mind does tricks on you, and nothing seemed to be disturbed. And I thought, well, you know, maybe the wind blew it. I didn't catch it good enough or whatever.

So I closed the door, went into the kitchen, and the kitchen door was wide open. And I knew immediately that we had had intruders because they'd taken out all the louvered windows in the kitchen window, removed the mosquito netting, and they'd come into the house. My first concern, obviously, were the two children.

So I ran into the kids' room, and they were fast asleep in their bunk beds. And then I began looking around. Went back into our bedroom, and I noticed that a tape recorder that we'd been listening to a tape had been unplugged just right below my wife's pillow.

I mean, not that far. Gone around to my side of the bed and removed my wallet from the nightstand. And I realized, again, that's how close we came.

They were there within a matter of inches of us. And it all happened secretly. It wasn't until it was too late that we discovered it.

And what Peter is saying here is false teachers will come into the church. And they will come in stealthily, they will come in secretly, and they will introduce doctrines that are damnable. And then notice.

Even. Even denying the master who bought them. Even denying.

In other words, they will go to this extreme of denying, not the Savior, but the master who bought them. In other words, they will tailor-make the gospel to fit a very selfish clientele, if you like. And they will deny God the access to the life of the very one that He washed and cleansed.

Deny the master. That word in the Greek, I'm not a Greek expert, but I've looked it up. It means a despot.

It's the strongest word for a master. And this teaching says, you can say no to the master. The very one that bought you.

Now, we don't do it in so many ways. But we deny the master. I'm sure most of you have seen the film that Mel Gibson produced a number of years ago on the passion, the death of Jesus Christ and so on.

He didn't portray it as well as the Bible does, obviously, because he forgot about the fact that his visage was marred more than the sons of men. When they plucked out his beard, his head was just a bloody mess and so on. But he did a pretty good job.

But why did man put Jesus Christ on the cross? We know from God's point of view why God sent His Son. God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son. But why did man put Jesus Christ on the cross? Well, Jesus told us why, in the form of a story, a parable.

He said there was a certain landowner who went to establish a kingdom. And after he set things in motion, basically, he left. And the inhabitants got together and they said, we will not have this man rule over us.

That's why they put Jesus Christ on the cross. We don't accept him as our king. We will not have this man reign over us.

And here we go with the gospel. I come along and I'm a sinner. I hear about the death of Jesus Christ.

I say, Jesus, I need to be cleansed. I need your forgiveness. I accept you as my Savior.

Come into my life. Wash me, cleanse me. But let's get one thing straight.

I will not have you reign over me. And we don't say it in so many words. We just very conveniently forget about the sign of the cross.

But in essence, we're no different than the Jews. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. He came as king.

For this reason I was born, he said, that I might be king. I might be lord. I might be master.

We don't want you as our master. We don't want you as our king. We want you as our Savior.

Let me read it one more time. But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies in James' damnable doctrines, even denying a master who bore them. Turn with me now to the book of James, and we'll close here in a moment.

James chapter 4. Verse 13. Come now, you who say today or tomorrow we should go into such and such a city, spend a year there, engage in business or make a profit. Now here is somebody that we can all identify with this.

Somebody just planning their life. Let's say this is a teenager. They're in their last year of high school, and they have gone and done some tests.

They've gone to the counselor, and the counselor's given them some sort of advice. You know, you've got aptitude in this area, that area, and so on. In this case, you could be a good businessman.

You've got a good mind on your head, you're good at math, and so on and so forth. And the young man says, you know, that's always what I wanted to do anyway, and this is confirmation. The tests sort of prove it.

And so, you know, he lives in Finley, and the University of Finley closed down long ago. And so he has to leave Finley, and he has to go to, you know, some big place close by in Minneapolis or something. So here is somebody.

Let me read it in that context. In other words, they're not talking about doing anything sinful. They're not talking about going to Chicago and joining the mob.

They're not talking about, you know, going down to Columbia and getting involved in the cartel and bringing drugs into the country. They're not talking about opening some counterfeit business and, you know, making money that way. They're not talking about going to Vegas and opening some blue joint or anything like that.

They're just simply deciding what to do with their life. In this case, I want to be a businessman, and every businessman wants to make money, right? The problem is, let's call him Johnny. Johnny's 18 years of age, and he gets accepted in the University of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and he goes to Pastor, goes to Pastor Mark, and he says, hey, you know, guess what? And he's all excited.

Pastor Mark's got a few other people lining up wanting to see him, and he says, listen, I can't talk to you right now, but why don't you come around in the morning? So Johnny comes around, they sit down together, and Johnny is just absolutely overflowing with joy. Pastor, you don't realize, you know, all my life I've wanted to be a businessman. I never thought I'd get into this prestigious school, but I've got a letter of acceptance here, and I'm going to be leaving.

By the way, next Sunday's going to be my last Sunday. I appreciate you if you'd pray for me as I go. I don't know when I'll be back, and so on.

You know, every pastor's gone through that. You know, when such and such a family come up, you know, they're being transferred. Their AT&T has asked Brother So-and-So to go to their base in Colorado, and Sister So-and-So's leaving to go nursing, and this brother's doing this, and, you know, we lay hands on them and bless them.

And so Johnny wants to be blessed, and he wants to be sent on his way, but Pastor James here, or Pastor Mark, says, hey, hold on a minute. Verse 14. You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.

You're just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Listen, son. Johnny, let me tell you something about life.

It's going to be over before you know it. It's a vapor. Before you know it, you're going to have grandkids.

It's amazing how the months and years go by. Johnny, listen. Life is going to be over before you know it.

The Bible says it's like a weaver's shawl. It just goes across the loom of time, and it's gone. It's like a breath that you take.

There is descriptions of the brevity of life in the Bible. And so now James is trying to put into perspective to this young man who's got his whole life, he thinks, before him and so on. He says, listen.

It's just a vapor. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills. Let me say that again.

Instead, you should be saying, if the Lord wills, we shall live and do this and that. In other words, James looks at Johnny and he says, Johnny, I haven't heard a single word about the will of God. All I've heard is that when you were a young man, you had an itch to become a businessman.

But I haven't heard a single thing about this being the will of God. Instead, you should be saying, is this God's will? As it is, he says, you boast in your arrogance. And that sort of boasting is evil.

Therefore, to the one that knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. To him it is sin. You see, to go contrary to the will of God is the greatest sin.

No, it is the greatest sin in homosexuality or murder or rape or anything else because you are denying it. It's very nasty, unfortunately. See, we really don't understand the cross, do we? Take up your cross.

If any man, come on, not just a few select, you know, green berets, spiritually speaking, SEAL team type Christians, if any man come after me, he's going to die. He's going to die and he's going to take up his cross. By the way, I'm in charge.

You follow me. I'm not going to follow you. You follow me.

We have a gospel now that says, God, would you follow me? This way, please. I want to do this. I want to go here, you know.

And we've reversed the whole message of the gospel. Let me ask you this. Do you belong to Him? Have you given Him a right to rule your life, your money, your time? Do you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you're in the very center of the will of God? That's what it really means to be a Christian.

Let's close with prayer. Father, we just read that you went to redeem for yourself a people. A people for your own possession, sellers for good works.

A people that will partnership with you, a people that would be laborers together with you. A people that would share your burden, share your heart for a last and dying world. A people that would be willing to lay aside their own agenda, take up their cross and follow you.

Father, I pray that both in this meeting tonight for the potential, if we were to truly give ourselves to you, change our community, change our world. Father, we don't want to give you just our sin. We want to give you our life.

If you've never given God your life tonight, here's an opportunity. Let's just stand together. These altars, there isn't really very much room here.

I'm going to ask you just to surrender your life to me. It's like getting married. You don't know if you're going to have children or not have children, or where you're going to end up, whether it's going to rich or poor, or better for worse, and so on.

But it begins with, I do. The same thing is true when we accept Christ. Lord, here's my life.

I give you my life. I don't know what God's going to do. That's His property.

But over the course of the next weeks and months, I believe God will make His intentions known. He'll begin to lay something on our heart, begin to open doors and close doors, and so on. As long as He knows that He has us in His, us in our entirety, that we belong to Him.

It's His prerogative. And if you've never surrendered your life like that, you can do it tonight. Say, Lord, here I am.

Take me. It's fearful. I admit that because we're relinquishing the very, the most precious thing, our will.

We say, God, not my will, but Your will. Let's just take a moment. Let the Spirit of God have His way.

Because I know there's individuals here, many young people. You've got your life ahead of you. You should go voluntarily.

What are you going to do with it? What are you going to do with your life? Simply settle down, get married, have children? Or even say, Lord, how do I turn into Your eternal purpose? Lord, what are Your plans? What is Your purpose for my life? Lord, You redeem me to Yourself. I belong to You. I'm no longer my own.

I no longer have any rights. I'm a bondservant of Jesus Christ. If you want to transact business with God, come forward here.

Say, Lord, I've never consciously given You my life.

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