

The Extent of Christ's Love

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love as the foundation of the Christian life and the consequences of not loving God.

Duration: 1:00:00

Scripture: Proverbs 25:2, Matthew 26:39, John 16:14, John 17:23, 1 Corinthians 16:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 1:17-18, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Gods Love", "The Cross"

Description

This sermon delves deep into the profound love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, emphasizing the value of intimate fellowship with God and the importance of understanding the depth of God's love for each individual. It highlights Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, his sacrificial death on the cross, and the significance of forgiveness in response to Christ's ultimate sacrifice.

Transcript

You know that one of my favorite verses in scripture, which I believe teaches one of the greatest truths contained in the whole Bible, is John 17 verse 23. It's a prayer of Jesus. The whole of John 17 is his prayer.

And when a person prays alone, he is unburdening what is in his heart. Not so much prayer in public because in public we are conscious of other people. But when you're praying alone, you've got a burden in your heart.

You really know what is the greatest longing of your heart. Could be anything. It could be a material thing, could be spiritual.

But it's when you're alone, you're praying and pouring out your heart to God, that you discover what is the deepest longing of your heart. And that's how I look at John 17. I see what is the deepest longing of Jesus' heart.

There are, you know, all of us have deepest longings and then other longings which are not so important. So the reason I want to know the deepest longing of Jesus' heart is because I want that to be my longing too. Because I want to be like Christ.

I'll tell you honestly, I'm not so keen on being like Christ externally. You know, as far as we know, he had long hair and wore a robe and he was a carpenter and he did miracles. And I'm not so keen on that because he didn't come to make us like him externally.

But it's that inner life. And I see something in John 17 of Jesus' inner life. Now, if you look at some Christian churches and organizations and you watch them for a while and you see what is their greatest longing, you'll see that it's evangelism.

You know, going and sending out missionaries and all is great. I believe God is interested in that too. But Jesus speaks here about another type of evangelism, not the commonly understood type, not the type by sending out missionaries and going out, but rather another way, which is the burden of his heart.

And that is by the world seeing his children and where the world can't see his children united and the world can't see my unity with children in other parts of the world, but in a local church. That's why God plants a number of local churches in different parts of the world. That's why I personally don't believe in mega churches, which are so huge that you don't even know the person sitting next to you.

In a local church, it's meant to be like a family. We know one another and we love one another. In a mega church, it's like sitting in a cinema theater and maybe that's needed as a preaching center to reach out to great crowds.

Great. But that's not a church. It's a preaching center.

So here in John 17, 23, he says to the father, I in them and you in me. And when he says them, you know, he says earlier on in verse nine, I ask on their behalf. I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom you have given me, but they are yours.

So verse 12, while I was with them, I kept them and I guarded them. None of them has perished except the son of perdition. So that he's talking about the leaven.

His whole prayer here is for the leaven and then others who will believe because of them. But why doesn't he pray for all the others? Because these leaven were totally committed. I mean, Jesus wasn't even praying for the 500 believers who would see him after his resurrection.

You know, Jesus appeared after his resurrection only to believers. And one Corinthians 15 says there were 500 of them, 500 at least. Why didn't he pray for them? Why didn't he pray for the 120 who he knew would be seeking for the baptism in the Holy Spirit? Here's a group of 500 believers.

Here's a smaller group of 120 seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And here's a smaller group of 11 who are disciples. And in John 17, he's not praying for those believers seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but for the disciples.

So I see that I want to follow Jesus who said, verse 9, I don't pray for the world. I pray for the disciples. I'll tell you, that's what I do.

I don't pray for the world. I pray for the disciples. And there are other people who have, if you have a burden, which you've got to make sure the burden is not created by yourself or by some books you read.

But the true burden comes from God. And I see that Jesus said, I don't pray for the world. I'm praying for these.

And that others will be added to these who are disciples like them. He's not interested in the riffraff who come to Christianity for other benefits. Yeah, I want Jesus to bless me.

I want Jesus to heal me. I want Jesus to prosper me. There are multitudes like that.

There were multitudes like that in his day too. And it's interesting. Jesus never wasted his time praying for them.

He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He said, I pray for these who forsook everything to follow me, who really want to be on this earth, a representation of God's kingdom. And I'll tell you something, my brother, sister, if you happen to be that type of disciple, you can be pretty sure Jesus is praying for you.

But if you're one of the riffraff who come to Jesus for healing and prosperity and some material blessing, or you joined the church because you thought that's a good club to belong to, where people are nice and care for one another, a good place for my children to grow up, and all these other reasons. Well, I'll tell you, God will bless you with material things, that's for sure. He may give you a better job and better salary, because God makes the sun to rise on the good and the evil.

You only have to be good or evil to get material blessings. He makes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. You've got to be either unrighteous or righteous to get material blessings, and everybody qualifies.

And that's why you find a lot of atheists who earn a lot of money more than you. And you find a lot of atheists who are healthier than you, who have less sicknesses than you, because those things are given to everybody. But you won't find an atheist who is more spiritual than a disciple of Jesus Christ, never, nowhere in the world, never in history.

History has raised up many, many dictators who are powerful and rich and healthy and who live long and all that, but they're never raised up. Satan's never been able to raise up a person who is spiritual. So if you ever think that material blessing or physical health is a mark of God's blessing, you will join the crowd of atheists and dictators who've been blessed in that way.

But if you really want the mark of spiritual blessing is that God makes you more and more like Jesus. If he's made you more, a little more like Jesus in the last one year, he has blessed you. If you haven't become a little more like Jesus in the last one year, I don't care what job you got, I don't care how much increment you got in your salary, God has not blessed you with the spiritual blessing of the new covenant.

So he says, I pray for them, and the prayer is in verse 23, I in them and you in me. It's a connection, Jesus in me, the Father in Jesus, and I'm connected to almighty God. And that they may become perfect in unity.

Do I envisage a time when all the born again believers in the world will become perfect in unity? No, I don't. I don't think that'll happen in Bangalore, I don't think it'll happen in the world, I don't think it'll happen in CFC, because the Lord is not praying for all of them. He's praying for those who've decided to forsake everything in order to follow him, for whom Jesus is more important than anything on this earth.

And that doesn't include every believer, it doesn't even include everybody in CFC. A lot of other things are more important than many of you. I mean, be honest.

And if you don't see it, I can see it pretty clearly. A little difficulty or a little bit of rain or thing is enough to make you complain against God or miss a meeting, or perhaps some of you love money more than you love Jesus Christ. So he says, I'm not praying for them, I'm praying for these who are really committed, that they'll be perfected in unity.

Why? Because ultimately it's through that little group of people who are perfected in unity that God is going to accomplish his purpose on earth. The rest can enjoy the blessings, but these are the ones with whom I don't want to be one of those who enjoys God's blessings. I want to be one of those because I've got only one life to accomplish God's purpose on earth.

And he says, I want them to be perfect in unity so that the world may know, and this is what the world has to see through you and me. What should the world see? You know, we live in the world, we meet people, our neighbors, our relatives, many unconverted people, our office co-workers, and many people around us. We meet people in the bus, auto rickshaw drivers, railway porters.

We meet so many people, the world around us. When they look at my life, I apply this to myself and you can apply it to yourself. They must know that the father sent Jesus and that God loves me as he loved Jesus.

That's what I want the world to know, that when they look at my life, they have to say there's no explanation for this man's life except that there is a God in heaven who loves him. Is that what people say when they look at your life? There's no explanation for this man's life except that there's a God in heaven who loves him immensely because there's so many things I can't explain. God in heaven who loves him, that's what Jesus said for every one of us.

If you want to, if you're a disciple of Jesus, read it yourself that the world may know. And I tell you, not other believers in the church. Other believers in the church will blindly say, yeah, yeah brother, the Lord is with you.

But the world is not going to say that easily, the Lord is with you. You know that. Believers are kind and blind sometimes, so they say the Lord is with you.

But the people in the world are not blind. They can see pretty clearly by the way you speak, the way you live, your attitude to them, your attitude to money, your attitude to so many things. They're not going to be so quick to say the Lord is with you like the believers around you.

So don't go by the testimony of kind blind believers. But listen to what the world is thinking about your life. And they watch you in your office, in the bus, in the train, and in crowded places.

If you want to see human nature at its worst, watch out in crowded places. There they must see, well, this man is different. This woman is different.

Your children must say, my mom is different. My dad's different from all the others in the world around. In a better way.

The world may know that God sent Jesus. It's not by preaching. And that the world may know that God loves me as he loved Jesus.

To understand that, you know, that is the reason why we have so many problems. We have not understood ourselves, first of all, how much God loves us. The intensity of his love, we have not known.

You know, the first commandment that Jesus said when somebody asked Jesus, what is the Jewish man who asked this question in Matthew's gospel chapter 22, verse 33, a lawyer. A lawyer means not what we understand by a lawyer today, but one who studied the Old Testament law. That's the meaning of that word lawyer in Matthew 22, verse 33.

A man who had studied the Old Testament law thoroughly, and for them, the great commandment was the Sabbath. You shouldn't do any work on the Sabbath day. That was to them more important than almost anything.

So this guy wanted to test Jesus, verse 33, and he asked him, what do you think is the greatest commandment in the law? And Jesus said, in none of the 10 commandments, but the basis of all the 10 commandments, he said, he said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. That is the first commandment. The first commandment is not to know the Bible.

It's not to read the Bible in the morning. It's not to pray. It's not to go to meetings.

It's not to get baptized. It's not even to get baptized in the Holy Spirit. It is to love God with all my heart, so that there's no place in my heart for anything else or anybody else.

No place in my heart for my wife, children, money, job, property, house, nothing. It's God and whatever God gives. And no place in my heart for whatever God doesn't give.

And with all my soul, with all my emotions, and my mind, and will, and everything, I must love God. If I haven't fulfilled the first commandment, what are you saying that I do so many other things? I pray so much every day. I fast so much every day.

That's what the Bible every day. And I go to so many meetings a week. And I attend all the conferences.

What's the use of all that? I haven't obeyed the first commandment. God does not have complete control of my affections and my heart. And he says this is like a coin with two sides.

You can't get a coin with one side printed on it. If it's only one side printed, it's counterfeit. When you get a coin, look the other side.

Both sides printed okay. What's the other side of the coin? You must love your neighbor as yourself. And for Christians, you must love one another as Christ loved us.

That's the new commandment. It's higher than love your neighbor as yourself. So the second commandment is love your fellow believers as Christ loved you and love all others as yourself.

So that's linked up to the first one. And John says, if you say you love God and you don't love your brother, you're a liar. You're not a believer.

You're a liar. So that's like a counterfeit coin. No one can say he loves God if he can't love his fellow believers.

So why is it? So in other words, what I learned from that is one is dependent on the other. And then Jesus said on these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets. This is the foundation.

All the 10 commandments and all the other commandments are based on these two. If these are not there, the whole building collapses. So when we try to do something for God without this foundation, our whole Christian life will collapse.

And it deserves to collapse because you're building on sand. What are you building on? No foundation. Everything we do for the Lord must be based on these two.

This is the whole Bible. The law and the prophets is the word for the Bible. If today Jesus would have used the Bible, the whole Bible depends on these two.

The whole Bible is resting on these two commandments. Please remember that. I want to say to all of you who thought you have done many things for God, if you don't have these two, everything else is useless.

That's why the Lord told the elder in Ephesus, you're doing so many wonderful things. You've got so many meetings and so many activities, but you don't love me like you did at first. What's the use of all this? It's worthless.

I'm going to chuck you out. Imagine somebody being thrown out who goes regularly to meetings, who reads the Bible every day, who prays so much, and who is very active, lives a very moral upright life, and he gets thrown out by God just because he didn't love God with all his heart. In fact, this is so serious that let me show you one of those verses you probably haven't even read, or if you read it, haven't noticed it.

It's one of those small verses tucked away at the end of 1 Corinthians 16. 1 Corinthians 16. Have you read this verse? Verse 22.

If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. What a word. Curse the guy who doesn't love Jesus.

Not curse the guy who doesn't read the Bible, or doesn't pray, or doesn't come to the meeting. Curse the guy who doesn't love Jesus. Then be accursed.

Or as the Message Bible says, if anyone won't love the Lord, throw him out. Make room for the master. Make room for the Lord.

That's Maranatha. So it's pretty serious, and that's why the Apostle John, at the age of 95, when he knows he's writing the last, he wrote five books, John's Gospel, 1, 2, 3, John and Revelation. He's writing the last, there were 61 books already, and they were all written maybe 15, 20 years before this.

Now the last five books of the Bible he's writing, and especially in John and John's letters and episodes, he uses the word love about 50 times. Love, love, love, love. 50 times, and that's about one third of the use of that word throughout the New Testament.

So he knew what was important towards the end of his life. He looked around at backslidden Christianity in the churches around him, and he knew what was missing. What was missing was not tongues.

What was missing was not healing. What was missing was not the prosperity gospel. What was missing was love, love for God and love for men, and as I look around at Christendom today, it's pretty much the

same.

There's plenty of the other stuff, but fervent love for Christ, and fervent love for one another, fervent love in the home between husband and wife, between parents and children, those things are missing. In the church, fervent love where we don't speak evil, and don't gossip, and don't backbite, it's missing. You know if John said in the, John said in 1 John, we are in the last hour.

In 95 AD, it was the last hour. It was already 11 p.m. Where are we now? We're pretty close to 11 59, I think. Very close.

We're in the last minute. What should we be concentrating on? Love. Love for God.

Why don't we love the Lord so much? Let me turn you to a verse in 1 John 4. 1 John 4, we read here, verse 19. 1 John 4 19. We love because he first loved us.

We love Jesus to the measure in which we understand his love for us. Because we love because he first loved us. Have you noticed in your human relationships, I mean this is true, all of us, you tend to love more those who show more love to you.

That's right. You see somebody who shows such a lot of affection for you, it's very difficult not to love him. You don't have to produce love for that person.

I mean you spontaneously do it because you see so many expressions of his love for you. I mean you don't love somebody who just gets up every morning and say, hey I love you brother. Not that type of guy.

I'm talking about a person who manifests it in so many ways. He doesn't have to tell you to love him. You automatically love him.

It's spontaneous. It's like that with God. But if somebody, for example, if somebody hasn't loved you enough, or you don't know how much he loves you, it's like the story which perhaps many of you have heard, which is the story of this mother who a little girl looked at her mother and said, mom I love you so much.

There's every part of your body I love except your hands. They're so ugly, so black and full of scars. I hate your hands.

They're all scarred, ugly hands she had, all burnt. And then she said, well my little girl let me tell you a story. When you were a little baby, accidentally you fell into the fire somewhere and I put my hands in and grabbed you out and saved your life.

That's why your body wasn't burnt, but my hands got all burnt that day. Then that little girl said, mom I love your hands more than any other part of your body. It's when she knew how much those hands meant, then her love increased.

You see the devil keeps us from a knowledge of God's love for us because he knows if you know how much God loves you, boy you're going to love him with all your heart. And the devil is determined to keep your religion, just bible reading, praying, going for meetings and religious activity and even evangelism and all that other type of stuff, so long as you don't love God with all your heart. That's why he wants to keep you ignorant of how much God loves you.

So my brothers and sisters, we need to have our eyes open. In the old testament, God's love was only manifested in words, words, words. Adam loved, Adam and Eve loved something God had created, a tree more than God himself.

And all human beings love what God has created more than God himself. That's why they sin. When they sin with a woman, it's because they love that woman, not love, they love the pleasure more than something which God has created more than God himself.

When they love money, they love something God has created more than God himself. The same sin of Adam, he loved what God has created. Every sin comes like this, when you love something God created more than God himself.

Or in Adam's case, he wanted to please his wife more than he wanted to please God. That's another reason for sin. Whenever you want to please a created being more than the creator, you sin.

All sin is there in Genesis 3, the root of it all. Loving created things more than the creator, wanting to please creatures more than the creator. But you can't blame Adam, because where was the manifestation of God's love for him? If you asked Adam before he sinned, hey Adam, how can you tell me that God loves you? Oh well, he says, look at all these wonderful trees here, there are mangoes and pineapples and oranges and all that.

I mean, is that the proof of love? Somebody comes and brings you mangoes and pineapples and oranges, would you say that he loves you a lot? Maybe he does, but that's all his understanding of love. Look at this beautiful heavens and the sky and the stars and all that, it's wonderful. That was the only understanding of love he had.

If you go to the Israelites, they would say a little more. Well, God delivered us from slavery, brother. We were slaves.

And if God has delivered you from tough situations, you can say, oh that's a pretty good manifestation of God's love. The understanding of God's love increased in the time of Israel more than Adam had. But what about us? Jesus said in John 15, John's gospel chapter 15, verse 13, there is no greater love that anyone can have than this, to lay down his life for one another.

That's the best way to love, to lay down your life. Or like they say in today's language, put your life on the line for your friends. You know, that's what Jesus did.

And I want you to understand something of this. When I was converted, that was nearly 50 years ago, 49 years ago, I'm very thankful that from the beginning, the Lord made me spend hours meditating on the love of Jesus for me on Calvary. So that my response and my giving my heart to the Lord was not to go to heaven or to escape hell.

I think I can stand before God and say, I had no desire to go to heaven or to escape hell. That was not why I gave my life to Christ. I know there are many people who give their life to Christ to go to heaven.

I know there are many people who give their life to Christ to escape hell. I know there are many people who give their life to Christ to get some material blessing or healing, but it's not me. I gave my life to Christ because I saw how much he loved me to such an extent where I said, Lord, I'd be ready to go to hell if you're there.

That's all I want. I wasn't interested in the golden streets or the mansions. I mean, I've never been interested in the mansions.

I said, Lord, you can give all my mansions to everybody else. The crowns, whatever I have, give it all to somebody else. I just want you.

And in my first Bible, I wrote in the front page of my first Bible, which I ever bought, 1959. Whom have I in heaven but you, Lord Jesus, and there's no one I desire on earth beside you. And I've tried to keep that true all these 49 years because of one reason.

I saw more and more through the years how much Jesus loved me. That's made a tremendous difference in my life. That's why everything else that I've done or lived my life has been built on this foundation, loving God with all my heart, because he first loved me.

And I feel that many, many Christians have not understood, like that little child didn't know how much her mother loved her. I think many of us don't know how much Jesus loved us. So I want to explain something to you as to what it means when Jesus said, lay down my life for our friends.

You see, many of us have, some of you may have seen the film The Passion of Christ, and you really weep when you see there how Jesus was whipped and hammered and his one eye was swollen and all that. I wept. And I wept many times when I've seen films about Jesus being crucified.

But I remember in my younger years that I, all those films, it was only momentary. You see it for a while time, you weep, and then the next day you go and live as you like. We need to understand something deeper because the suffering of Jesus on our behalf on the cross was not just physical.

It's very important to understand that. When we explain to little children who don't understand spirit, soul, and body and all that, it's right to say Jesus died on the cross and explain how they whipped him and hammered him. And that's what the Bible says.

You know, when you're an outward Christian, you see only the outward sufferings of Jesus. When you move on, when you go to college and you become an inner Christian, then the Holy Spirit shows you the inner sufferings of Jesus, which are not written in the Gospels. You know, Jesus said that.

Have you read this verse, John 16? When the Holy Spirit comes, verse 14, John 16, 14, he will glorify me because he will take the things of mine and will reveal them to you. He will show you things that are not written here. He once said to his disciples, there are many more things I want to say to you, but I can't explain them because you can't bear them now.

That means you can't understand them now. I mean, you can't explain calculus to a first standard student, not because there's anything wrong in it. Calculus is a very useful subject, but you can't explain it to a first standard student and say, you can't understand it now.

That's what the Lord was saying. You know, the more we grow in the Christian life, the Holy Spirit is able to take some things of the inner life of Jesus and show it to us. And if you have not seen anything of the inner life of Jesus, you're pretty much an outward Christian.

That's why you're occupied with what Jesus did outwardly. His miracles, he walked on the water, he fed the 5,000 phyllos and two fishes, he suffered so much on the cross. Great, it's all true.

That's all there is in the Gospels. But it's the glory of God, it says, to conceal a matter. You read that verse in Proverbs 25? It says in Proverbs in chapter 25 and verse 2, it is the glory of God to conceal a matter.

God has hidden certain things in scripture, concealed. That's part of his glory. But if you're a king in Christ, it says there's the glory of kings to search that out.

But if you're a slave of sin, the slaves won't find it. You got to conquer sin first. It's no use trying to understand the deep things of Christ if you're still a slave to sin.

Then brother, I would say, try and get rid of your sin first, become a king. Kings can search out and see things which God has concealed, which God reveals. You know, Paul told the Ephesians, I'm praying that God will give you the spirit of revelation.

He doesn't say, read my episode 10 times and you'll understand it. No. Ephesians 1, 17, 18, he says, I'm praying that God will give you a spirit of revelation.

There's no other way you fellows will understand it. I can explain, I can preach the same message a hundred times, you won't understand it. Because it's revelation.

When Peter said, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, he said, blessed are you, my father has revealed this to you. That word revelation was not in the Old Testament. The Old Testament was study, understanding.

The New Testament, revelation. The secret of the Lord is with those who fear him and to them he will reveal his new covenant. That's Psalm 25, it says that.

So, Paul does even Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, he says, think about what I'm saying. Verse 7, and the Lord will give you understanding. He doesn't say, read what I've written 10 times.

See, that's the fault with Bible schools. You don't find a Bible school that emphasizes revelation. Bible schools emphasize study.

That's why Bible school graduates are boring preachers. They've got no revelation. In my life, I've been blessed tremendously by men of God who never went to a Bible school.

The other ones who blessed me the most. It's a difference between academic intellectual study and revelation of the Spirit. You can sit in the meeting here and listen to a word that I'm speaking and it just goes into your head.

You know what I say to you, brothers, thank God you're paying attention. Thank God your ears are open. Thank God your mind is not wandering somewhere.

I hope not right now. And thank God you're listening, but it's still only entering your mind. I pray that God will give you the spirit of revelation, that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, that you may see what the death of Christ is.

The physical death of Christ is not enough to take away our sins. Because if I were to ask you, what is the punishment for your sin? Is it physical death? Did Jesus take the punishment for my sin or not? I think all of us would say yes. If he has not taken the punishment for our sin, we have to go to hell.

That's all. We know he took the punishment for our sin on the cross. What is the punishment for sin? Physical death? If that is the punishment for sin, listen, this is logic.

If that is the punishment for your sin, then how should God punish you when you sin? Kill you. Okay, when you die, you're killed. You've taken the punishment for your sin.

You should go to heaven. Every person who dies should go to heaven because he's died. He's taken the punishment himself.

So if we say that Jesus physically died and that was it, well, he didn't have to die. I could die myself. But we know what the Bible says, the punishment for sin is to be cast into hell forever.

The one who spoke most about hell was Jesus Christ. Now even the apostle Paul never spoke about hell so much as Jesus Christ. And I'll tell you why.

Because Jesus loved people more than anybody else. Number one. Secondly, he's the only one who had actually seen hell before he came to the earth.

So he could tell people about it. You realize that somebody who has seen a country can tell people more about it than somebody who's only read about it. You know that.

Somebody who's actually seen a country can tell you more about it than someone who's only read about it. Jesus had seen hell, the reality of it, the awesomeness, the terrible, the awfulness of it. And he warned people more than anybody else of that danger.

So we don't hear much preaching about hell these days. I mean, you listen to all the Christian television programs and see how many people preach on hell. Repentance, hell, and all are not found nowadays.

They're all preaching all this psychology stuff, feel good, nice, God's accepted you, God's loved you, and all that stuff. But Jesus spoke about hell. He spoke about the worm that never dies.

He spoke of the fire that is never quenched. These are all pictures he used. Pictures to show us the terribleness of eternal separation from God.

The fire, the worms are all just picture language to show you that you'll be forsaken by God for eternity. Because that has to be the punishment for sin. Sin is like the break in connection of an electric wire.

The electric wire, if it's just broken even half a millimeter, the car light goes. It doesn't have to be broken and set apart one meter away for the current to go. It's just broken one millimeter, the power is gone.

It's like that sin. You don't have to commit 25 sins or 2 million sins to be broken from God. One sin.

I don't think many Christians understand that. Or to use another illustration, one hole in a vessel is enough to make all the water leak out. You don't need 25 holes.

Whether it's one hole or a thousand holes, it's gone. Whether the break in an electric wire is half a millimeter or a hundred meters, it's the same. Whether you've committed one sin or a million sins, it's the same.

Your fellowship with God is broken. And the punishment for one sin or a million sins is the same. The punishment for the Pharisees who never committed physical adultery, never committed physical murder,

it's exactly the same as for the worst prostitute and the worst murderer in the world.

If you understand that, then you understood a little bit of what sin is. Separation from God forever. That's what hell is.

To be with demons and the devil forever and ever and ever. When you spend 10 million years there, 10 million years, you think one year is long, 10 million years, you've just begun brother. It's awesome, awful to be separated from God forever.

William Booth, who was the founder of the Salvation Army, once said when he was training people to preach the gospel, he said, after I taught them how to preach the gospel at the end of their one-year course, I wish I could suspend them over hell for 24 hours and watch what's going on in hell and then send them into the streets to preach. Boy, they would preach differently. It's true.

I don't think many of us have seen the awfulness of hell, the terribleness of being separated from God. We don't understand that on earth because nobody is forsaken by God on the earth. People sometimes talk about a God-forsaken place.

There is no God-forsaken place on this earth. The only truly God-forsaken place is hell. Why is it there are so many atheists and people who rebel against God, who are so healthy, who are so rich, who live long, who live comfortably, whose children are blessed? What does that prove? That proves God has not forsaken them, even though they hate him.

He sends the rain and the sun on the atheist farmer to bless his field. There's nobody on this earth who's forsaken by God. If God had forsaken this earth, do you know what would have happened? Every non-unbeliever would have been filled with demons, just like that legion cutting themselves and running around naked.

Do you see the world like that? No. Why is it the demons can't get in these unconverted people? Why is it the demons can't get inside some of you backslidden believers? The demons would have gotten to you long ago with your backsliding and your hypocrisy. It's because God hasn't forsaken you yet.

But if you remain like that, you're on your way. I'll tell you that. That is hell.

It's terrible. So that is the punishment for God. So when Jesus hung on the cross, if he did not take that punishment, he did not take my punishment.

It's so clear. He had to take that punishment in order to take the punishment for my sins, to pay my debt. And that's why he hung six hours on the cross.

And as I understand it, the first three hours, he was not bearing that punishment. He was doing a lot of other things like saving that thief. Do you know that place where it says that they took a sponge of vinegar to Jesus and Jesus refused it? But at the end, or when he was hanging on the cross, you read that in towards the end of John 19.

At the end, when he said, I thirst, they gave him some vinegar. That's John 19, verse 29. He said, I thirst a jar full of sour wine, John 19, 29.

They put a sponge full of it and brought it to him. And Jesus received it and then said, it is finished. They offered him the same thing at the beginning.

As soon as he was crucified, they give it to all the crucified people. It's a sort of anesthetic. You know, like when you're suffering, when you're going through painful surgery, they give you an anesthetic to relieve the pain.

This was a type of anesthetic, a little mercy that the Roman soldiers showed to these fellows. Okay, fellas, here's a little bit of relief for you. Drink a little bit of this.

And Jesus said, no. You know why? Because if he was anesthetized and hanging there, how could he save that thief on the cross? There, I see something of Jesus' tremendous love. As the anesthetic was brought to his mouth, the Holy Spirit said, don't take it.

I know it will relieve my pain, but the Spirit says, no, I won't take it. Boy, I want to be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit like that. This is what it means to follow Jesus, that those little, little times the Holy Spirit says, no, don't go there.

Don't say that. Don't do this. It's always a purpose.

Stop that. Spend two minutes in prayer now. It's always a purpose.

And I regret those times that I had not obeyed. I want to obey. And a little later, there was this thief needing to be saved.

How could an anesthetized, sleepy Jesus say anything to him? He had to be saved. Those words of Jesus saved him. How could he take care of his mother? He was the eldest son.

He's got a responsibility for his mother. He couldn't trust his other brothers. He had to hand him over to John.

How could he say the words, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So that we would understand what he went through on the cross. He did not take the anesthetic. Thank God.

He did not take the anesthetic till the six hours were over. At the end, when he knew the time was over, he could take it and say, it's finished. I mean, after that, it was just less than a minute and it was all over.

But I see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying like this. In Matthew 27, you know that prayer. He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and he said, Matthew 26, sorry.

Father, if it is your will, verse 39, Matthew 26, 39, if it is your will, let this cup pass from me, but not as I will, but as thou wilt. You know, Jesus, when he was praying to his father in heaven, he said, I don't want to drink this cup. What was this cup? It wasn't physical death.

Jesus would have been willing to go through a hundred calvaries for you and me. Martyrs have gone singing to their, when they were being eaten by lions and being burnt at the stake, Jesus wouldn't be a coward. He was not afraid of physical death.

He was not afraid of the shame, the ridicule, the mocking. Strung up there with an underwear, you know, despised and laughed at by everybody. He was not afraid of all that.

He'd be willing to bear any shame out of his love for you and me. Even if we are ashamed of him, he was not ashamed to hang on a cross for us. But what was he shrunk from? Only one thing Jesus valued more

than anything else, which we sometimes don't value, fellowship with the father.

He had had that from all eternity, not millions of years, but trillions and trillions and trillions from all eternity. That was one thing he valued, fellowship with the father. And he had that even when he came to earth.

He became a man, he had fellowship with the father. It was the most precious thing to him on earth. That's why he would go and spend time alone with the father sometimes.

He valued that more than physical comfort, more than food, more than clothing, more than honor, more than fellowship with the father. And he knew as he came near the cross that that will be broken when he takes my sin, your sin. Just for a short time.

I mean, think of the number of days when you're broken fellowship with the father and doesn't even bother you because we don't value it so much. You know, it's like people who live in the slums, they're quite used to dirt and filth and all, they don't bother. But if you who live very hygienic surroundings, you go there, you don't even want to be there for five minutes.

That's how Jesus was. He didn't even want to break fellowship with the father for five minutes. It was like you going and living in the dirtiest slum.

Oh boy, I don't want to live there for five minutes. That's how Jesus felt about fellowship with the father. Perfect hygiene is perfect fellowship with the father.

And Jesus wanted it all the time like you want perfect hygiene all the time. You don't go to a dirty, filthy, stinking hospital with muck lying around for treatment. You wouldn't want to go to that hospital even for five minutes.

And when we understand how fellowship with the father is really the most valuable thing on earth, we will never want to lose it by one angry word, one dirty thought, one wrong attitude towards somebody, even the slightest sin. Jesus was like that. That's why he never sinned.

You know, one of the ways in which we can overcome sin is when we learn to value fellowship with the father like we value physical health and hygiene. So he valued this so much and said, father, I don't want this to be lost. I don't want to drink this cup.

But obedience to you is more important to me than anything. Even this terrible thing, if you want me to lose it, I'll lose it. But I don't want to drink it.

And I can imagine a conversation going on. You know, we've got to apply this personally. Whenever you read the Bible, make it personal.

Not Christ died for the sins of the world, but Christ died for me. Make it personal. Christ died for the sins of the world is just history.

Christ died for me. That's testimony. That means, I'll tell you what it means.

If all the people in the world were good, and I was the only sinner in the world, Christ would have come from heaven for me. Okay. Something more than that.

If all the people in the world were good, and I was always good, except I got angry once, once Christ would have had to come for me. Will you take anger more seriously from now on? If all the people in the world were good, and I was always good, and I lusted after a woman once in my mind, Christ would have had to come and die for me. Will you take that more seriously from now on? We haven't seen sin.

We haven't seen the awfulness of sin. It's so light. We just talk about it so lightly as if it's just a, you know, a little bad food, which gave us a little stomach upset.

We get over it. It's not like that. It's worse than poison.

Poison never send anybody to hell. Only send them to the grave. Sin sends people to hell, which is worse.

So Jesus valued this fellowship, and He said, Father, don't take it away, and then I want to make it personal. Now Jesus is, all the people in the world are good, only me. I'm the only sinner.

Jesus is going to the cross for me. You can make it personal, too, and get somebody who's praying, preparing to go to the cross for me. I can imagine a conversation going on with the Father.

Okay, the Father says to the Son, you can come up here. You've never sinned. Come straight up here, but Zach will go to hell.

Don't forget that. Zach will go to hell. Okay, Father.

Okay, Father, I'll go for His sake. I remember some years ago when Jesus opened my eyes to see His love for me, not on Calvary, but in Gethsemane. He loved me, and for my sake, He said, I'll drink that cup.

I say, Lord, I never want to forget it all my life. That's why the truth of Christ's death for me is always a new song, always a new song. In heaven, it says they sang a new song, Revelation 5. What is that new song? Thou hast died, thou hast shed thy blood.

You say, that's a new song. I've heard it a thousand times. Why is it new? Because it's always fresh.

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the death of Christ is always fresh. It's as if I'm hearing it for the first time. How marvelous, how wonderful that you could die for a wretch like me.

And I tell you this, my brothers and sisters, whenever the death of Calvary becomes an old story to you, you can be pretty sure you're backslidden. When you sing it, we sing so many songs about the death of Christ. It's like shaking our hips like these rock stars, and it's all a wonderful melody and all that.

Please consider yourself a backslidden Christian. If it doesn't touch your heart, doesn't bring tears to your eyes, it's an old song. You're not ready for heaven.

They sing a new song there, Christ died for my sins. I've known that personally for 49 years, but it still brings tears to my eyes when I think that Jesus said yes for me. He didn't want to have me.

And then when he hung there on the cross and for three hours said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's the only time Jesus in eternity, in all eternity, only once Jesus called his father God. Every time he called him father, father, father, father, father, father. Once he called him God because he was not standing before his father.

Now he was standing before the God of the universe, the judge of all the universe, and being punished for sin, which God treated as if it was his, when it was mine. You know, it says in 2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 21, God made him to be sin, who knew no sin. You ever thought of that? He made him to be sin.

I don't change the words. Don't say he took our sin and all that. Just say it like it is.

God made him to be sin, who knew no sin. That's worse than falling into a septic tank or any filthy thing that you can think of, to be made to be sin, to do it for somebody else. How many of you would jump into a septic tank to help somebody, particularly your enemy, this is a million times worse than that.

He made him to be sin, who knew no sin. He said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The only prayer of Jesus that was never answered, never answered. Every prayer of Jesus answered immediately, except this one.

Why have you forsaken me? Why? Because God doesn't answer the prayers of people who are in hell. And what Jesus experienced those three hours was hell. Think of all the suffering you're going to go through if you miss heaven.

In hell and for eternity, eternity, eternity, all that suffering of demons harassing you and the devil harassing you and forsaken by God and no understanding of God and suffering, torture of mind and body. Concentrate that eternity into three hours and you'll understand something of what Jesus experienced on the cross. More than that, not just your suffering, multiply that by all the billions of human beings who've been on earth since Adam.

So this, this suffering multiplied by billions, so many people put into three hours. Jesus suffered that on the cross. He actually suffered hell.

Like one hymn says, ever when I'm tempted, make me see beneath the olive's moon pierced shade, my God alone outstretched and bruised and bleeding on the earth he made. And make me feel it was my sin as though no other sins were there. That was to him who bears the world a load that he could scarcely bear.

That was to him who bears the world a load that he could scarcely bear. He did it for you. He did it for me.

I will be grateful to him all the days of my life. I never feel I've lived long enough to show my gratitude to Jesus. I keep praying, Lord, give me another 20 years to show you that I'm thankful for your dying for me, not in words, but with the life poured out for you to serve you.

I will never in my life think that I have made any sacrifice for Christ when I think of what he did for me. Sacrifice, I don't know the meaning of that word. Like the stars disappear in the light of the sun, if you can see the sacrifices you have made, you must be in the darkness because only in the darkness you see the stars.

And the sun rises, you don't see any stars. When you see the sacrifice of Christ, all your so-called little sacrifices disappear like the stars in daylight. Do some of you think you've done something for the church? You've done something for the Lord? You're in darkness, brother.

That's why you see those stars. I'm in the bright sunlight of Christ's love for me. And I tell you honestly, I'm not trying to act humble.

I don't feel I've done a single thing for the Lord because I see the greatness of his love for me. And at the end of it, three hours he said it's finished, it's over. Then he could call him father again.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. The relationship was restored. Don't confuse what I said now with the false teaching of many charismatic preachers whom you see on many television channels who say that Jesus went to hell for three days and was tortured there by the demons.

That's blasphemy. When he said it's finished, it's finished. That's because people read the King James Version.

He went to Hades, he went to the paradise section of Hades. He told the thief today I'll meet you not in hell, in paradise. He was for three days in paradise.

Then he came back to his body on earth and rose again. What shall we render unto the Lord for all his love towards us? He doesn't want words. Mere words of mine will never repay the debt of love I owe.

Teach me Lord on earth to show by my love how much I owe. We love him because he first loved us. I hope all of you will have learned to love him a little more today.

And love one another a little more. He died not only so that we might be forgiven. Listen, he died so that you might forgive your brother what he did against you.

That you might forgive your sister, that you might forgive your wife, forgive your children, forgive your parents, forgive your husband, whoever it is. He died so that forgiveness may be our way of life. I pray that God will open the eyes of your heart so that you get revelation.

Let's pray. Let's bow our heads for a few moments before God. Is this going to be the emotion of a moment like many other sermons you've heard that stir you and that have not accomplished a permanent change in you? I speak to you sinners, backsliders, half-hearted, and also to the wholehearted.

What does the death of Christ mean to you? What are you going to give in return to him? Meeting attendance, Bible reading, or all of your life? Lord, all my heart from this day, I love you because you first loved me. It was my sin that took you to the cross. Heavenly Father, my words are so inadequate.

I feel at the end of it all I haven't done justice. I'm absolutely conscious of it. Lord, have mercy.

Let your spirit reveal what I could not explain. Make it real to us that we can love you with all of our hearts and one another as you loved us. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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