



## **SECRET CHURCH**

### **CRUCIFIXION, SALVATION, AND THE GLORY OF GOD**

Oh, God, we pause at the outset of this evening, this Good Friday evening, first and foremost to tell you that we love you, and we adore you, and we glorify your name. Lord Jesus, we exalt you for the cross where you died, for the tomb where you were buried, and for the day when you rose from the grave. We exalt you as the ascended King of kings, Lord of lords, to whom all praise is due. We want your name to be exalted in our time together tonight. We know that all of us sitting in this room, sitting in homes and churches, and different contexts, all of us are undeserving of your mercy on Good Friday. So, we want to dive in deeply into your Word, and we want to know the riches of your mercy. We know that apart from your Spirit's power in our time together tonight, our time will be in vain.

You know, Lord God, how inadequate I am to communicate the great truths of your Word. You know how incompetent we are to understand all the wonders of your mercy. So, we pray that you would attend our time together tonight with the power of your Spirit. As we study your Word in this thing we call Secret Church, we know and are keenly aware that we have brothers and sisters around the world for whom Secret Church is no game, who at this moment are tortured and imprisoned, persecuted, some facing threat of death for clinging to the cross of Christ. They're sharing in your sufferings. So, we pray from the outset of our time together tonight that you would sustain them, that you would strengthen them, that you would uphold them with your righteous right hand, and that you would help us to identify with them, and that you might, by your Spirit in your Word, equip us tonight to serve alongside them, to give our lives to make this gospel known to the ends of the earth.

We pray that the fruit of our time together tonight...in all of these different places...we pray that the fruit of our time together would be your gospel resounding from our lips, and your glory evident in our lives, and this gospel spread to all nations. So, toward that end, we pray, and we praise you, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

### **The Doctrines Before Us**

#### **We want to contemplate the wonder of crucifixion.**

We're going to dive in from the very beginning. I think it's on page six in your guide. Strap your seat belt on, and let's get started. The doctrines before us, here we go. What are we looking at tonight? Three main goals. One, we want to contemplate the wonder of crucifixion. On this Good Friday, we remember that when it was *"about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last,"* (Luke 23:44-46). So, on this Good Friday, we want to go deeper than just images in our mind of a bloody cross. We want to explore the wonder of what was happening in the

moment where Jesus Christ breathed His last. What does that mean? I want to contemplate the wonder of crucifixion.

### **We want to consider the meaning of salvation.**

Second, we want to consider the meaning of salvation. This is really our main focus tonight. We're going to go pretty swiftly through that first part...wonder of crucifixion. Obviously, not because it's not important, but we actually did a previous Secret Church on the atonement, and we dove in deep into the cross of Christ and what it means. So, if you want to go back...and I realize most people were not a part of that Secret Church, so if you want to go back, there are resources available online for free, but we're going to hit some of the highlights from that. That's going to drive us into the meaning of salvation.

So, Jesus died on a cross two thousand years ago. The question for us tonight is, "How does His death become a reality in our lives in the 21st century, in this room, in the rooms where we gather together tonight? How does His death become a reality to us now?" Just because He died, that doesn't mean everyone is saved from their sins. Now, there are a lot of people who would say that. Some popular teachers today believe that, but they are wrong. They're dead wrong. They're eternally wrong. No matter how popular their book is.

Salvation. Christ bought us on a cross two thousand years ago becomes a reality in our lives through salvation. The question we're looking at tonight is the question that's been asked ever since the Philippian jailer said in Acts 16, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" There's a lot of confusion in our day on how that question should be answered. So, our goal over the next few hours is to answer it. Now, we don't want to complicate salvation. We don't want to digest this so much that we lose the simplicity of salvation. At the same time, we want to be clear about salvation. If our eternity is dependent on having a biblical understanding of salvation, then this is worth spending some time on.

### **We want to comprehend the importance of mission.**

So, we want to contemplate the wonder of crucifixion, consider the meaning of salvation, and comprehend the importance of mission. After Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave, He said to His followers, "*It is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things,*" (Luke 24:45-48).

That's the deal for us tonight. Once we see what it means for Christ to die on the cross, rise from the grave, for His salvation to absolutely revolutionize your life for all of eternity...once we realize these things, we will be compelled to give possessions and plans and dreams, to surrender homes and cars and whatever the Lord asks us to do to make this good news known to the ends of the earth. That's where we're going to end up...the importance of mission.

## **The Danger Within Us**

### **Spiritual deception is entirely possible.**

However, I want to start with you individually. Whether you're sitting in this room, or you're sitting in a home, or in a church, or a building somewhere else, I want to warn us from the very beginning that there is a danger within us. One of the most frightening passages of Scripture for me as a pastor is Matthew 7:21-23. Listen to what Jesus says:

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

That passage keeps me awake at night. To think that there are people, many people, Jesus says, who will be surprised one day to find that, though they thought they were safe before God, they were not. That there will be many people who, on that day, will be surprised. They thought they were on a road that leads to heaven, and the reality is, they were on a road that leads to hell. That's frightening. So, amidst a sea of 50,000 people, I could wish to have this conversation one-on-one with every single person. So, if we could just, in a sense, hone in here, not talking to the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, next to you, right where you are sitting. Spiritual deception is entirely possible. Don't miss this. Jesus is speaking of this. It's the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7. He's talking, not to atheists and agnostics and pagans and heretics; He's talking to religious people. Religious people. Devoutly religious, who were deluded into thinking they're saved, when they're not. People that would be shocked to find out on that day that they were not going to heaven. Reality here, in Matthew 7: it is possible to fool ourselves when it comes to our spiritual condition. It is possible to fool ourselves when it comes to life's most important question.

2 Corinthians 4:4; it's not in your notes, and we'll get to it later, but 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "*The god of this world*" (Satan) "*has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.*" Blinding minds. He's blinding minds, and I'm convinced one of the ways he's blinding minds is by convincing people, even people in the church, that their salvation is sure, when it is not. That their eternity is secure, when it is not. I'm convinced he's doing it all over the church. In our contemporary efforts to reach as many people as possible with this great gospel, we have maligned, and misrepresented, and minimized this gospel. We have pared down salvation to a shrink-wrapped presentation...that if you can get someone to say the right things back to you, pray the right things back to you, we'll pronounce you saved, and you can move on.

A friend of mine, four years old...he's not four years old now, but was at one point four years old...although I have friends with four-year-olds also, but when he was four years old watched a *Tom & Jerry* cartoon, and in the cartoon, Tom was thrown into hell for something bad he'd done to Jerry. Scared this little four-year-old out of his mind. He is sharing that with someone, with a man at his church. The man looks at him and says, "Well, you don't want to go to hell, do you?" The four-year-old says, "Well, no," and he says, "Well, just pray this prayer, 'Dear Jesus. I know that I'm a sinner. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I receive you into my life, and accept your gift of eternal life in heaven. Amen.' Son, you are saved, and you have no need to worry ever again about hell." That's a lie. That's a lie, and it's been sold in all kinds of different forms all over the place. It's frightening, the effect, that we can literally take the lifeblood...the gospel...the lifeblood out of Christianity, put Kool-Aid in it's place and sell it to as many people as possible, and in the process, deceive souls.

### **Spiritual deception is eternally dangerous.**

Spiritual deception is entirely possible, and spiritual deception is eternally dangerous. It's what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7. Could it be that there are some people, a host of professing Christians...I would daresay, maybe, even some who are involved in this picture, maybe many who are involved in this picture tonight...who think they are eternally saved, when they're not?

### **We gravitate toward that which is easy and popular.**

You back up in this passage a bit, and you see Jesus warning us that we gravitate toward that which is easy and popular. He said in Matthew 7:13-14, a few verses before, *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* Jesus says there's a wide gate. It's easy. It's inviting. It's spacious. It accommodates the crowds, attractive, inclusive, few rules, few regulations, few requirements.

Now, don't miss it: it's a religious road. Remember, the context here is a religious people. There is a religious road that does not require much of you. There is a religious road being advertised before us today that makes grandiose promises at minimal cost. All it requires is a one-time decision, and then you need not worry about God's commands, God's standards, God's glory after that. You have a ticket. You are on your way to heaven, and your sin will be tolerated along the way. It's a wide road, and Jesus says, "The gate (of salvation) is narrow." The word here for "narrow" means to press in, to groan, to press through, as if under trial or persecution. The Scripture's teaching, here, that the way of Christ is hard to follow. This is not isolated from Jesus. Luke 14:26-27, *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."* You go to the very end: *"any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*

People say, "Well, this is getting a little heavy from the start here. Don't you need to wait to address these things once Christians are more mature?" Don't miss it: this was people's introduction to Jesus in the first century. This is foundational for what it means to be a disciple. This is deeper than praying a prayer. This is laying down your life. This road is not for those who want a cheap and easy way to heaven while you're indulging in the pleasures of earth. That road is headed to destruction...*"apoleia"*, Matthew 7...definitive destruction, plunged into a destiny of death. That's what awaits the easy, popular, comfortable, ever-so-crowded roads.

The narrow road leads to life, and it begs the question, "Which road are you on, college student? Which road are you on, businessman or businesswoman? Which road are you on, mom or dad, middle-schooler, high-schooler? Which road are you on, single adults, senior adults?" Important question.

The road is hard. Not only is it hard to follow, but the way of Christ is hated by many. Jesus said, three chapters later, in Matthew 10, *"I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves...they...will flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings..."* In the middle of that passage, *"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake."*

People say, "Well, if we just start living like Christ, the world will be drawn to us." On the contrary, if we all start living like Christ, the world will hate us, because the world hated Him. He lived so contrary to the ways of this world.

### **We can profess publicly what we do not possess personally.**

So, here's the deal. Jesus says we gravitate toward that which is easy and popular. He says we can profess to follow...Matthew 7...we can profess publicly what we do not possess personally. You keep going in that passage, after verses 13 and 14, He says,

*"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits."*

Jesus is talking here about false professors of Christianity...people who claim to have Christ, but don't. It's the same thing we saw in verse 21, "Lord, Lord, did we not do all of these things?" Jesus says, "I never knew you." Oh, see how close you can be to spiritual reality, and yet, be clouded in superficial religiosity?

Jesus is saying here that the way of Christ is always fruitful. How do you tell true followers of Christ from superficial followers of Christ? Look at their fruit, Jesus says, not just gifts and miracle workings. John 15: look at the fruit of their life. *"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."* A good tree always bears good fruit. A follower of Christ bears the righteousness of Christ, the truth of Christ, the love of Christ. You don't see truth of Christ? You don't see righteousness of Christ? You don't see love of Christ? There's a question about whether or not Christ is there. You see that later in James 2. Faith without works is dead.

The way of Christ is always fruitful, and the way of Christ is always faithful. *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but..."* listen to this, *"...only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* You catch that? Jesus just said that the only one who enters into the kingdom of heaven is the one who obeys the Father's will. The only one who enters into the kingdom of heaven is the one who obeys the Father's will. "David, did you just say that works are involved in salvation?" No, I didn't. Jesus did. Now, I want you to hang with me until around 10:00, because we're going to get to how works relate to salvation. We've got to grapple with this from the very beginning.

*"Only he who obeys, who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven, will enter the kingdom of heaven."* *"You are my friends..."* John 15, *"...if you do what I command you."* Acts 26 talks about deeds in keeping with our repentance...lack of obedience, lack of fruit, lack of deeds is a picture of deception, and we can profess publicly what we do not possess personally.

### **We can assume salvation without biblical foundation.**

Finally, when we hear spiritual deception, we can assume salvation without biblical foundation. Listen to this last illustration in the Sermon on the Mount:

*"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it,"* (Matthew 7:24-27).

Two builders...they have a lot in common. Both of them have heard the words of Christ. They both build a house. From all accounts, it looks like they look the same, but then when the storm comes, and one stands, the other crashes. The difference is the foundation.

"Everyone who hears these words of mine..." (hear the foundation), "...and does them." Hearing the Word of God, putting into practice. So, a proper foundation first. The way of Christ is dependent on His Word. "Hear these words of mine." Jesus is talking to a whole group of people in Matthew 7 that had built a system of traditions and opinions of man and rules and regulations of man to follow, thinking that, "If we do these things, we'll be okay before God," and Jesus says, "You've missed the whole point."

Is it possible, in the 21st century, for us to build a whole host of traditions and ideas and opinions of men that we think equate with salvation, but are not actually in the Word of God? "What must I do to be saved?" "Invite Christ into your life; accept Christ into your heart." Both phrases that are never mentioned in the Word of God. The last thing we want to do is assume salvation without biblical foundation. I want to use the Word here. Jesus says in Matthew 4, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" The first Christian sermon, Acts 2, "*Repent.*" So, what does that mean? That's what we're going to look at tonight. What does that mean? We don't want to settle for trite phrases that are common to us. We want clear truth that comes from God. That's how we want to understand something.

The way of Christ is dependent on His Word, and the way of Christ is obedient to His Word. So, here it is again, "*Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice.*" Puts them into practice. Now, again, we're going to look later at the relationship...how works and salvation relate to one another, but I want you to see that Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount, and He says, basically, "There's a storm of holy judgment coming, and the only one who will stand on that day is the one who has heard the Word of God and put it into practice."

## The Purpose

So, that leads us to our purpose tonight, and really, my challenge to every single person that's involved in this whole picture tonight, without exception, to every pastor, to every deacon, to every church staff member, to every church member, every church attendee...every single person...here's what I pray that, by God's grace, we will do tonight.

### **We need to listen to our Savior.**

First, we will listen to the Savior. No matter who you are, no matter what background you're from, what traditions you hold to, I want to invite us to listen to Christ. Maybe you're even here, and you're from another religion, or you're a vowed atheist or agnostic. I want to invite you to hear why Jesus is the only "*name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved,*" (Acts 4:12). I want us to listen to Him. I hope you'll see the Word saturated during our time tonight.

### **We need to examine our souls.**

We're going to listen to the Savior. We need to examine our souls. I know that even starting this way...I was hesitant to dive into Matthew 7 from the start...instead of kind of easing in, just kind of jumping into the deep end, but here's the deal: 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*"

So, here's the deal. I feel the tension in diving into Matthew 7, because I know that there are a whole host of people in this room and in locations around the country and beyond,

who are saved, who have been gloriously saved from their sins, and the last thing I want to do is for people who have been saved to walk away just doubting their salvation. That's the last thing I want. My prayer is that you have been saved, and that, tonight, you would be reminded of the beauty of your salvation and what it means for God to have saved you from your sins. You walk away comforted and encouraged, built up, and challenged, but if, for people who I know...in a sea of 50,000...I know there are many who have not been saved, and some of those who think they have, and for anyone who thinks they have been saved when they have not been saved, the last thing I want is for you to feel comfortable tonight. That's the last thing I want.

If you have not been saved, my prayer is that you will be...that many will be convicted. Be convicted. George Whitefield said, during one of his sermons on the subject of false professions of faith in Christ, he said,

Now then, for God's sake, for your own souls sake, if ye have a mind to dwell with God, and cannot bear the thought of dwelling in everlasting burning, before I go any further, silently put up one prayer, or say Amen to the prayer I would put in your mouths; "Lord, search me and try me, Lord, examine my heart, and let my conscience speak; O let me know whether I am converted or not."

That's a good prayer to pray, and I'm praying that God will use it to draw many tonight to Himself...truly, authentically...for the first time, and in that process, if you have been saved, that you would be encouraged as you're reminded in the beauty and wonder of your salvation.

### **We need to abandon ourselves.**

So, let's listen to the Savior, examine our souls, and then let's abandon ourselves. In light of this great salvation, let's lose our lives. For all who have been saved, be equipped to go where He leads. Be compelled to give whatever He requires, so that the nations might be saved, because we are living and looking forward to the day when, "*a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne...crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'*" (Revelation 7:9-10).

## **The Plan**

So, here's the plan. What we're going to do...this is kind of an outline for our time together tonight. Crucifixion...we're going to look at that. We're going to look at the meaning, what it meant when Jesus breathed His last. The Father is satisfied, and I kind of just noted there the different doctrines we'll hit on. Not exhaustively, each one of these, but we're going to hit on the Father satisfied, the Son is sacrificed, and the Spirit is sent. I want you to see the Trinity involved in what's happening at the cross.

Then, we're going to spend the bulk of our time in that middle section, salvation. How God reveals our need. We're going to look at depravity. How God changes our heart, regeneration. How God enables our belief, conversion. How He reverses our status, justification, adoption, union with Christ. He transforms our lives, the doctrine of sanctification, preservation and perseverance. Then, He resurrects our bodies, the doctrine of glorification.

Then, we'll get to the glory of God in the very end. Crucifixion and salvation are all by God's grace. When you are good and tired, we will dive into one of the deepest mysteries of the Bible, and we will solve election this evening. No, in all seriousness...oh, I pray that we look at what the Word says about election. Not John Calvin, or Jacob Arminius, but God's Word, and His Word will lead us to see that crucifixion and salvation are all for God's glory, and the doctrine of global mission. Sound like a plan? All right, we are already behind, so let's go. Here we go.

## CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion. What happened at the cross two thousand years ago, and how does that bring us salvation today? I want us to see the satisfaction of the Father, sacrifice of the Son, sending of the Spirit. If those three things are not covered, salvation is not possible. Salvation is only possible if the Father is satisfied, the Son is sacrificed, and the Spirit is sent.

### The Father is Satisfied The Doctrine of God

#### **God must act at all times in absolute consistency with the perfection of His character.**

So, we'll start with the Father is satisfied, doctrine of God. It's important to start here because in order to understand the cross rightly, our starting point has to be with God, not with man. In order to understand the cross rightly, we've got to start with God, not with man. So, let's start with God. God must act at all times in absolute consistency with the perfection of His character. He must act in absolute consistency with the perfection of His character. "*He is who he is,*" Exodus 33. He does not change, Malachi 3, James 1.

#### **Consider the character of God.**

So, we need to consider the character of God. How we understand Him, and our relation to Him will affect everything about how we understand the cross. So, character of God...an overview. He is sovereign over all. The earth belongs to Him; He's sovereign over all, Psalm 24 says. He created all things. He knows all things. He sustains all things. He owns all things. Deuteronomy 10, "*Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.*" Sovereignty. Sovereignty means authority, the one who is the Author of creation has authority over all creation. Everything belongs to Him. You belong to Him. He created you. He sustains you. He knows you, and He, in a very real sense, owns us and has authority over us. He's sovereign over all.

Second, He is holy above all, unique, set apart, completely other. "*There is none holy like the Lord,*" (1 Samuel 2:2). He is holy above all, and He's righteous in all His ways. "*His ways are justice,*" Deuteronomy 32 says. A lot of people become angry with God because they feel like He hasn't given them a fair deal, but God's integrity is unquestionable. God always does what is right. In His very nature, He is unable to do that which is wrong.

He's just in all His wrath. Holy above all, righteous in all His ways, just in all His wrath. Because He's holy and just, a wrathful response to evil is not just possible for God, it is inevitable from God. It's His very character, His nature, for an infinitely good, holy God to

hate evil, to show holy anger toward evil. You see in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, humbling verses, frightening reality of Scripture. *"This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered..."* he's talking to Christians, *"...worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering – since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you."* He's just. You keep going, and it says, *"When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might."*

Here's the frightening reality of Scripture, ladies and gentleman: God will judge you and me, and He will be just. He is a holy God who is intolerant of sin. He hates wickedness. He *"cannot look at wrong,"* Habakkuk 1. He is intolerant of sin, and...follow this...He is indignant toward sinners. Indignant toward sinners.

One of the clichés...I've talked about this before...is that we say, "Well, God hates the sin, but loves the sinner." In one sense, that's true, but in another sense, it's false. A little orange book that I wrote, it's gotten some publicity in a couple of different places. Got some publicity in Birmingham, in *The Birmingham News*. The guy writing the article in *The Birmingham News* writes, "While it's a common pulpit truism," this is what he said in the article, "While it's a common pulpit truism that God hates sin, but loves the sinner, Platt argues that God hates sinners." Then, the article just moves on. That is recipe for a full inbox of e-mails. From church members, "What are you preaching, Pastor?" Then, from people outside the church who are not quite as kind. So, people are saying, "You believe God hates sinners?" This is one of those places where I, or we, could get in trouble. I get in trouble because I'm quoting the Bible.

Does God hate sinners? Psalm 5:5, *"The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man."* Maybe I should have said "abhor." Well, that's a better word. "No, no, no. You got the quote wrong. God doesn't hate sinners; He abhors them and destroys them. Could you write that down please?" It's what Scripture is saying. Fourteen times in the first 50 Psalms alone, we see God's wrath on the liar, His hatred toward evildoers, and it's not just Old Testament. New Testament, *"His wrath resting on sinful man,"* Romans 1:18. John 3:36...same chapter as this verse that celebrates God's love...you get to the end of the chapter, *"God's wrath rests on the sinner."* All throughout Scripture, we see a God who shows wrath toward sin and sinners. Lot's wife turns back...pillar of salt. Evaporated because she looked back.

Leviticus 10, capital punishment for faulty worship. Numbers 15, a guy is picking up sticks on the Sabbath. He's caught. They bring him before the Lord, and they say, "What shall we do?" The Lord says, "Stone him." Stoned for picking up sticks. Numbers 20, God's faithful servant, Moses, disqualified from entering the Promised Land for what would seem to us like a pretty minor offense. Joshua 7, a whole family destroyed due to one person's greed. 2 Samuel 6, punishment by death for trying to keep the Ark of God from falling. Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira, deceiving in their offering, capital punishment. They fall over dead. That'll hurt your church attendance next Sunday when people start dying in the offering. This is not good.

You look at these passages, and you start thinking, "Is God overdoing it here? Isn't this severe? Stoned for picking up sticks? They deceived in their offering. They die?" This is key. We look at this kind of punishment. We think it's severe because we have a man-centered

perspective of sin, and this is where we begin to realize that the issue is not how severe we perceive the sin. The issue is the one who is sinned against.

If you lie to me, I'm not going to say I think you should be stoned. See, here's the deal. If you sin against a man, you're guilty, but not guilty of death. If you sin against an infinitely holy God, you are worthy of infinite punishment. We need a God-centered perspective of sin. You remember, it was one sin in Genesis 3. They ate a piece of fruit. One sin, and from that one sin came condemnation for all men. One sin, and what creeps into this world? All the effects of sin: tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, rape, murder, world wars, Holocaust...all spring from one sin, and in this room and the rooms we're gathered in tonight, we've committed thousands and thousands and thousands of sins.

We have a God who is holy in His wrath. Thankfully, these are not all of His attributes, but they are fully His attributes. He is sovereign over all, holy above all, righteous in all His ways, just in all His wrath, and He is loving toward all His creation. He's loving toward all His creation. God is love.

### **Consider the sinfulness of man...**

Now, do you feel a tension right there? Like, how does that square? Love and wrath. Feel the tension? Just hold onto that tension for a minute. Now, come to man before holy God. Consider the sinfulness of man. Our perception of sin has everything to do with our perception of the cross. We think...we talk about sin like it's a psychological problem we have. We say, "Well, I've done some bad things. I've made some bad decisions. We've messed up, and I need some help."

Ladies and gentlemen, our problem is much, much deeper than that. The Bible teaches that we have denounced God's sovereignty, rebelled against His authority. I put Genesis 3 here. Even though He said not to eat from the tree, we say, "No, we're going to do it our own way. You don't tell us what to do. We do what we want." We spurn His authority, sovereign authority over us. This is the God who beckons storm clouds, and they come. This is the God who says to the wind and the waves, "You blow here, and you waves, you stop there." This is the God to whom everything in all creation, all nature responds in obedience, and when He says something to us, you and I have the audacity to look back at Him in the face and say, "No. No, we've got better ways." We've denounced His sovereignty, transgressed Him, Leviticus 16 says.

We have dishonored His holiness. We've profaned His holy name. We've despised His righteousness. "*None is righteous, no, not one,*" (Romans 3:10-12). We have...follow this, after Romans 6:20 there...we have disregarded His wrath. We pretend like His wrath is not real, and we buck up, and we say, "It can't be true." Meanwhile, Scripture says that, before we were saved, we were...in Ephesians 2:3...we were "*by nature children of wrath.*" We have disregarded His wrath, and we have denied His love. We "*presume upon the...kindness*" of God, Romans 2:4. Our problem, ladies and gentlemen, is not that we've messed up. It's not that our life's not going right. We've done some wrong things, made some bad decisions. As long as that's the problem of how we perceive sin, we'll miss the picture of the cross.

### **The Divine Dilemma**

Feel this: we have denounced His sovereignty, dishonored His holiness, despised His righteousness. While deserving His wrath, we have disregarded it and denied His love. Now, this then leads us to the divine dilemma; here's the problem of Scripture. How can a just God save rebellious sinners who are due His wrath? That is the whole point and problem around which all of Scripture revolves. You look at this verse from Proverbs 17:15, "*He who*

*justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.*" Did you catch that? God Himself says, "If you justify the wicked...the guilty...if you say the guilty are innocent, then you are an abomination to the Lord."

Now think about it. Salvation is only possible...we've already covered the fact that we're guilty. Salvation is God saying to us in our guilt, "You're innocent." So, how can God say to us in our guilt, "You're innocent," when doing so would be an abomination to Himself? That's what we're talking about when we're talking about the satisfaction of God. How can a just God be kind to rebellious sinners who are due His wrath by His very nature? That's the question of the Bible: how can God be kind to us?

Now, that's not the question we think of. There are not a lot of people in our day losing sleep over how God can be so kind to sinners. No, we're pointing the finger at God, saying, "How can you show judgment toward us?" We're pointing the finger, saying, "How can you show anything but love toward us?" We turn the whole picture around. We say, "God, how could you not let us all into heaven?" The question in the Bible is, "How can God be just and let all these rebels into heaven?" That's the question around which the Bible revolves.

The tension of Scripture: how can God express His holiness without consuming us in our sin? How can God express His holiness without consuming us in our sin? How can God express His love without condoning us in our sin? How can he judge sin and justify the sinner, save the sinner at the same time? How can God satisfy Himself, His characteristics...be true to Himself is what we mean by satisfy...be true to Himself and save us at the same time? You feel the tension there in Hosea 11:8-9.

Here's the reality. When we see this tension, what we realize is that first and foremost, the cross is concerned with a demonstration of the character of God. The purpose of the cross, Romans 3:25, is to show the righteousness of God. "*Because in his...*" follow this, "*...in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.*" What does that mean? What it means is that in God's patience and mercy, God had been passing over sins all throughout the Old Testament, sins that were not duly punished. His righteousness not being rightly displayed.

You think about it, God's forgiveness of our sin is a threat to His character. I put 2 Samuel 12 there. Here's David, guilty of adultery, murder, lying. Nathan comes and confronts him about his sin, and this is how David responds, "*David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'*" And Nathan said to David, "*The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*" Did you hear that? Adultery and murder just passed over. Is that justice? No. If a judge were to look at this case today and say, "Well, I put adultery and murder away," we would have him off the bench in a heartbeat. That is not just. The judge is not right.

It is why John Stott said, "Forgiveness is for God the Father the profoundest of problems." Bishop Westcott said, "Nothing superficially seems simpler than forgiveness, but nothing, if we look deeply, is more mysterious or more difficult." Do we realize the greatness of the one whom we have sinned against? Do we realize that if he were to overlook our sin, His justice and holiness would be completely compromised, and He would no longer be God?

So, before the cross is for anyone else's sake, the cross is for God's sake. Don't miss this. The cross is primarily and ultimately a demonstration, vindication of the character of God. It is God showing, displaying His justice, His righteousness, due sin. Who did Christ die for? You? Me? Yes, in part, but not completely. The nations? Still not complete, not ultimate. Ultimately, Christ died for God. Christ died to show...it's why Watchman Nee said, "If I would appreciate the blood of Christ I must accept God's valuation of it, for the blood is not primarily for me but for God." We need to hear this.

We have heard the gospel presented as God's answer to all these human problems, and it is that in many ways, but first and foremost, the gospel is an answer to a divine problem, a demonstration of divine glory. It's the glory of God that drove Jesus to the cross. The glory of God drove Him to the cross. Listen to His words in John 12, "*Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.'* Then a voice came from heaven: '*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*'"

We say things like, "You were on the Savior's mind when He went to the cross. I was on the Savior's mind when He went to the cross." The Father was on the Savior's mind when He went to the cross, and we're going to show how this affects us, obviously, but follow with me. On the cross, Jesus is showing us that sin is infinitely offensive. The cross is a clear, public demonstration of just how severe sin is before a holy God. There is no room for self-exaltation at the cross. We say things like, "I wonder what Jesus saw in me that would drive Him to the cross?" It is your sin that drove Jesus to experience crushing, pulverizing wounds and being nailed to a piece of wood. That's what it was in you and me. There's no room for self-exaltation here. Everything at the cross is God-exaltation.

This is the character of God on display, showing that sin is infinitely offensive, and that God is infinitely glorious. He is sovereign over all, holy above all, righteous in all His ways, just in all His wrath, loving toward all He has made. The cross is not a display of the finite worth of man. The cross is a display of the infinite worth of God. The cross is not a picture of how valuable we are. The cross is a picture of how valuable God is, and before the cross is good news for man, the cross is good news for God. So, how does God satisfy Himself and save sinners at the same time? I am glad you asked.

## **The Son Is Sacrificed The Doctrine of the Atonement**

### **God satisfies Himself by sacrificing His Son in the place of sinners.**

That leads us to the second part. The Son is sacrificed, doctrine of atonement. God satisfies Himself by sacrificing His Son in the place of sinners. "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

### **Consider the person of Christ...**

Now, who is His Son? Consider the person of Christ. All of this, every single detail of this is vital to understanding what is happening at the cross. John Stott said, "The possibility of substitution rests on the identity of the substitute." Jesus, on the cross...we're going to fly through this...is fully man. He's fully man, "*made to be like his brothers in every respect,*" (Hebrews 2:17). Born of a virgin. He possessed the full range of human characteristics: a human body that "*grew and became strong*" (Luke 2:40) and became tired, "*wearied*" in John 4:6, with a human mind that "*increased in wisdom*" (Luke 2:52). A human soul. He said in Matthew 26, "*My soul is very sorrowful.*" Human emotions: He marveled, He wept, "*with loud cries and tears,*" Hebrews 5 says. Human emotions.

There was human observation. People saw Him as a man, as normal. What all this means is that Jesus is fully able to identify with us. Jesus is completely human. He is not unlike us, trying to do something for us. He is a representative of us. He is "*in every respect was tempted as we are, yet without sin,*" (Hebrews 4:15-16). He is in every respect like us as a man. Fully man, and Jesus is fully God. C.S. Lewis said, "The doctrine of Christ's divinity

seems to me not something stuck on which you can unstick but something that peeps out of every point so that you'd have to unravel the whole web to get rid of it."

His identity. John 1, Hebrews 1:8 make clear, He is eternal. "Of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.'" "In the beginning was the Word." The Word, Christ. He is Creator. "By him, all things were created," Colossians 1. He is Sustainer. "In him all things hold together," (Colossians 1:17). He's omnipotent. "Winds and sea obey him," (Matthew 8:26-27). He's omniscient, and He is sovereign. You look at Mark 2. He has sovereign authority to forgive sins. Matthew 11, He has sovereign authority to draw people to the Father. He is sovereign.

People say, "Well, did Jesus say that He was God?" Listen to His testimony, "I and the Father are one," John 10:30. John 8:58, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM," claiming for Himself the divine name of God from Exodus, in addition to all the other "I AM" statements in John. Then, hear man's testimony to His divinity. Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God," (John 20:28). Paul saying, "In him, the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily," (Colossians 2:9). "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," (Hebrews 1:3). Whoever wrote Hebrews made it clear. All of this means that Jesus is fully able to identify with God. John Owen said, "He who suffered was God." Jesus was not any less than God, not any less than the Father or the Spirit. He is God. Obviously, we don't have time to dive in-depth into this, but you go to Philippians 2:5-11, and you see part of the mystery of the humanity and deity of Christ in one.

When you see the person of Christ on the cross, this is not Jesus alone, as if He had no divine nature, not just a man. Not God alone, as if He was not a man, just divine. There on the cross is God in Christ. Fully God, fully man, uniquely qualified to represent both God and man, and mediate between the two.

### **Consider the purpose of Christ...**

So, this is His person. Now what about His purpose? Why did He come? He came to "seek and save the lost," (Luke 19:10). He came to live a sinless life. No guilt in Him. "In him there is no sin," 1 John 3:5. He was obedient, perfectly obedient to God, and this is key. This is going to affect everything we talk about later tonight. He had to live an obedient life. He didn't just come as a child and die as a child on the cross. He didn't just zoom down at the age of 30 and die on a cross for us. He lived an obedient life. He was righteous. 1 John 2:1 says, "Jesus Christ the righteous." He came to live a sinless life...which no one else in all history has done, by the way...and He came to die a substitutionary death. Substitutionary death, "To make propitiation," Hebrews 2:17, "for the sins of the people." What that means is to take the payment of sin that's due the people upon Himself. He came to be a substitute, to take our place, to stand where we deserve to stand, to endure what we deserve to endure. That's the whole picture. Yet, He had no sin.

He had no sin to pay for. Payment for sin: death. We see Him dying on a cross. He has no sin to pay for, so whose sin is He paying for? Substitute. He's in our place on the cross. In our place. He died in the place of the disobedient. He died in the place of the unrighteous. Skip down to 1 Peter 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." Our sins, in His body, on the tree, as our substitute. So, get the picture here. This is God Himself in the flesh, assuming the identity of sinners on the cross, standing in the place of sinners as a substitute for sinners, and this is where we see the whole picture now come together.

### **The Divine Dilemma Solved**

Divine dilemma solved at the cross. Divine satisfaction at the cross, the totality of God's character is expressed. You look at the cross, and you see all of God's holy characteristics:

love, wrath, justice, mercy. They're all there. You think about it, "Does God hate sinners?" Yes...look at the cross. This is so key. This is so key to understand, that when Jesus died on the cross, He wasn't just dying for sin, He was dying in the place of sinners.

We have this tendency to think of sin as if it's something outside of us. You're lying, cheating, or lusting, whatever it is in our lives. We think of sin as outside of us, and when Jesus went to the cross, He died for our sins, but the reality is, sin is not outside of us. Sin is at the core of who we are. We're sinful to the core, and when Jesus went to the cross and endured the divine wrath due sin, it wasn't just due sin, it was due sinners. He was standing in our place, and in that holy moment, on the cross, He was taking the divine wrath due your life and my life upon Himself.

So, let us not be quick to cling to trite phrases that make us feel good, sound good to us, but rob the cross of its meaning. Does God hate sinners? Yes...look at the cross, and His holy wrath due sin and sinners, and don't stop there. Does God love sinners? Yes...look at the cross. He did all of it for you and me. He did all of it instead of you and me.

This is the wonder of the cross, "*steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other,*" (Psalm 85:10) and in wrath, God remembers mercy. This is divine satisfaction through divine sacrifice, and as a result, salvation through God's Son is achieved. Essence of sin: man substitutes Himself for God, right? It's what we do, say, "I'm in charge here." Essence of sin: we assert ourselves against God, put ourselves where only God deserves to be. It's what we've done.

Essence of salvation: God substitutes Himself for man, and God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be. "He made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, in order that we might become the righteousness of God." Divine satisfaction through divine sacrifice. At the cross, God expresses His judgment on sin. At the cross, God endures His judgment against sin. At the cross, God enables salvation for sinners. Praise be to God.

Though we deserve His wrath, we receive His mercy. It's a Good Friday. It's a really Good Friday.

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