

The Eternal Witness

by Dennis Kinlaw

The cross is the central reality in God's work with us, and it is the test by which we test all things.

Duration: 42:37

Topics: "Eternal Witness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the nature of personal relationships and the consequences of sinning against others. He emphasizes the feeling of dread and relief when encountering someone we have wronged. The preacher then connects this to the death of Jesus, stating that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He highlights the significance of the communion ceremony, where believers partake in the breaking of bread, symbolizing the body of Christ being broken for their sins. The preacher shares a personal anecdote about a lunch with a doctor who was actively involved in the church but seemed busy and rushed. Finally, the preacher reflects on Jesus' troubled soul before his crucifixion, emphasizing the sacrifice he made for the redemption of the world.

Transcript

I would like to share with you two portions from the book of 1 Corinthians, reading first from chapter 1 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians. Reading from verse 21, For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs, and Greeks look for wisdom.

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than men's strength.

A second passage is in the fifteenth chapter of that same letter of Paul's, reading from the beginning of the chapter. Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preach to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you, otherwise you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to

James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also as to one abnormally born.

Will you pray with me? Our Lord, we come to the close of this series of Days Together in Revival. We want to thank you for what you have done for us, but now as we come to this closing hour together, we want you to finish the work that you have started for these days in every heart. Do not let one of us miss what you have to say to us tonight.

Give us the openness and give us that profound sense of your immediacy, of your presence with us that will cause us to respond to your overtures of grace, and we will give you thanks in Christ's name. Amen. There is no question but that the cross is the central reality in God's work with us.

All that one has to do is listen to the words of the greatest of the first century evangelists, Paul, when you find him saying to a group in a city like Cairn that when I came to you I had only one passion and one commitment, and that was to preach Christ to you and him crucified. That may be difficult, he said, for many people to understand. For the Jews it's a scandal, and for the Greeks it's foolishness.

But for us who are called, it is the power of God unto salvation. So the cross from that day to this has been the center of the Christian faith, and it is the test by which we test all things. Does what we believe measure up to what God was doing there, and is it consonant with what God was doing there? Because the scriptures are very clear that the cross was not an accident.

You will remember that Jesus said, No man takes my life from me, I lay it down of myself. My Father is pleased with me because I lay it down. I lay it down of myself because I love my sheep and give my life for my own.

It was not by accident that Christ died, it was by divine plan, and it was by that plan that God determined to redeem us. Now there is a very real sense in which the cross is God's answer to your sin and to mine. You find it in text like that which we read from 1 Corinthians 15, where he said, I delivered unto you the gospel, the good news which was given unto me.

And what was that good news which was given unto me of which Paul spoke? He said, It is that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Now the reference to the scriptures is to Old Testament scriptures, and it is Paul's witness that the word of God found in the Old Testament had one focal prophetic point, and that was Golgotha. That was the death, the passion of our Lord.

And so he said, I have given to you the good news which was given to me, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. But now it's not only in the biblical text we could find many passages like that to illustrate that. But perhaps the most dramatic evidence of it is that before Christ left his disciples, he said, there is something I want you to do on a regular and on a continuing basis.

It will be the ceremony around which the body of Christ gathers. It will be the sign of the fellowship of believers. And that is, he said, I want you periodically to take a loaf of bread and break it, and then share it together.

And as you do, you say, This is my body which was broken for you. And then take grape juice, wine, and share it together. And when you do, speak and say, And this is my blood which was shed for you and for the remission of your sins.

And so every time the body of Christ meets together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, what we are doing, as Jesus said, is remembering his death until he comes again. We are the people of the broken body. We are the people of the shed blood of our Redeemer.

We are the people whose very existence as a people was initiated by God in Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. Now if that was God's plan to take care of your sin and mine, what a plan it was, and what a costly plan it was to him. If you want to understand something of how costly it was, I think you must read very carefully those passages in the Gospels, particularly on that last night before the cross.

But also in that passage in John 12, when the Greeks came and said, We would like to see Jesus. You will remember when the Greeks came during that last week before the cross, representative of Gentiles like you and me, and said, We would like to see Jesus. Jesus was immediately reminded of what it was going to cost him that salvation might be brought to a whole world.

And he lifted his voice to his Father and said, Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Shall I say, Father, deliver me from this hour? No, he said, I can't do that. This is the hour for which I came. I came that I might give my life, that a world might be redeemed.

But you will see that he did not do it casually. We find him saying, My soul is troubled. The prospect of that cross is one which I do not find inviting.

And you will remember that last night of his life before the cross, one so holy that he had never quailed before, one iota of his Father's will before, prayed not once but three times. And as he prayed, the text tells us that he sweat as it were drops of blood and three times said, Father, if it's possible, find another way. But if there is no other way, this is my commitment, and we will go.

Now why did he recoil from that? There are many people who have faced death much more magnificently in one sense than Jesus did. All you have to do is read the stories of the martyrs, and you will find that there are many martyrs that marched gladly and joyously through grace to their death. But Jesus recoiled.

You are aware that Paul said, Whether I die or whether I live really doesn't make much difference to me. I only want the thing that will further the cause of Christ most. But Jesus recoiled.

Now why did he do it? I think because there was something in that death of his that you and I cannot grasp. Because there in that death of his, he tasted all of what it means to be a sinner and all of what it means to be lost and all of what it means to be lost eternally. He tasted it for us, and for the Holy One to have sin dumped upon him was more than he could imagine and more than he could freely invite.

And so he said, Not my will but thine be done. And so the cross is not a casual death. It is God atoning in himself by taking our sins and their consequences into himself in order that we might be delivered from them.

So there is a very real sense that this is God's answer to our sin. It is where God made our sin his problem. Now, if our sin is God's problem, that means that it's not simply a moral problem or an ethical problem, and it isn't simply a problem in our relationship with those that we have hurt or harmed.

But what we are saying is that there is something in our sins so offensive to God that there was no other way that God could be reconciled to our sins except by his sacrifice on Calvary's cross. Now, that's a note that's lost out of contemporary Christianity. We have long since lost the notion that our sins are highly

offensive to God.

I remember being in a conference where we were singing one of Wesley's hymns. Interestingly enough, it was a very evangelical and a very conservative conference theologically. And so when we came to the hymn that said, My God is reconciled, the leader said, Now we know that God doesn't need to be reconciled.

We are the ones that need to be reconciled to him. We are hostile and angry with God. God doesn't need to be reconciled, so we will sing it, Our God has reconciled.

Well, I want to say, if I understand the scriptures, there is something about our sins that is highly offensive to God, and he is the most aggrieved party of all when we have sinned. You will remember that David supported this notion. He had certainly committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he had committed murder in relation to Uriah, and he had fathered an illegitimate child with Bathsheba's son.

But when he began to try to deal with his problem, his cry was, Against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. His greatest problem was not with Bathsheba, nor was it with the ghost of Uriah, but his greatest problem was with the God whom he had seriously offended with his transgression. Now, that has an interesting consequence.

If my transgression is offensive to God, then my transgression suddenly takes on a transcendent implication. Because you see, if I sin against you in the course of history, history is a place of flux and flow and time and change. But you see, the thing we know about God is that he is the eternal one and he changes not.

And I think that explains a dimension of biblical teaching on sin that we tend to forget, and that is that when I sin against God, there are eternal consequences that come from that. There is something about my problem then that gets out of the realm of time and goes over into the realm of eternity. That means, then, that sin is not done with the doing.

It means that time isn't going to take it away because my sins have eternal consequences. Now, we get some indications of that in Scripture in that the cross was the answer to the sin problem of the human race. And when Christ died on Calvary in Palestine in the first century, the shadow that fell across him and the curse that fell across him included the sin of Adam and every person who had believed from the moment of the beginning of the creation.

You see, the cross is a point in time, but it transcends time because it's dealing with an eternally significant problem. I think if we understood that, I think we would be less quick to be casual about our sins. It's so easy to bring one into existence, and then when we've brought one into existence, it is so impossible for those of us who brought it into existence to take it away.

There may not be many places where we can be uniquely creative, but when you and I commit sin, we've brought something new into existence, and there is nothing we can ever do to want to undo or to remove that which we have created. Now, as you know, most of you know, I used to teach Hebrew, and that's where I feel most at home. I remember when I first became aware of how different some of the Hebrew thinking was from ours, and particularly in terms of some spiritual realities.

If you will read Isaiah 53, if you read it in English, if you look for it, you can see it. If you read it in the Hebrew, you cannot miss it. There is a realism about the sin dealt with in Isaiah 53.

It is so real that it breaks the body of the Savior. It destroys the body of the Savior. It is reality that falls upon you and him, not simply something that we think of as spiritual and without great significance.

Now I had some help in understanding that when I realized that in Hebrew the word for word is also a word for an object, a physical object. And so a word can be a thing you speak, but it can also be as solid as this. There is the word desk, and then the Hebrew word davar is the word for word, and it can also represent an object that has physical reality.

Now we think of a word in a very different way. We say he spoke, and we think, ah, he vibrated some vocal cords and there was a little change in the atmosphere, in the air, and those vibrations went out and impinged on somebody's nerves in that person's ears, and that person got a message, and the waves went on their way, and then they were dissipated and disappeared. And you and I, as of now, have no way of pulling those back and showing that they continue to exist.

But you see, that's the physical side of it. The Hebrew said when you spoke a word, you brought something into existence that once you spoke it, had a life apart from you, and there it was, and once you'd spoke it, you couldn't pull it back. Now you could say to somebody, I didn't mean that, but all you'd done is produce another set out there.

It's like the boy at Asbury who said to me, I made a mistake last night, Dr. Kinlaw. And I said, what was that? He said, it was a beautiful evening, the program was tremendous, afterwards we went out, she was dressed fit to kill, her perfume was right on, and I was in the mood for it, and I told her I loved her. And I said, what's wrong with that? Well, he said, the problem is in the light of, cold light of day to day, I know I overspoke myself.

And I say, well, what's the problem? Well, he said, I've got another date tonight with the same girl. And I said, well, what's the problem in that? He said, well, those words I spoke. I said, well, just tonight when you see her, tell her you didn't mean it last night.

Oh, he said, heavens no, I can't do that. He said, you see, what bothers me is when we get together tonight, there won't be just two of us, there'll be three. There she'll be and there I'll be, and there right between us will be those words.

And if I tell her I didn't mean it, then there'll be four of us. Now, that is the nature of personal relationships. Did you ever sin against anybody or break your word to anybody, lie to anybody? Do you remember how you dreaded to bump into that person again? And if it was a person who lived a long ways away, how relieved you were that you wouldn't have to meet that person again? Have you ever had an experience where you did lie to somebody and it became known, and you didn't see that person again for several years, and then bang, there was that person? I know what the first thing was in your head when you saw that person, and the chances are you know what was in the head of the person that saw you.

You see, personal relationships, personal sins are as permanent as the relationship, personal realities. And when we sin against God, we bring something into existence we cannot take away, and there is a there-ness about it that is frightening. And the scriptures indicate it is an eternal there-ness.

Now, you and I don't have much, we have difficulty understanding that because we don't think about eternal things and eternity. You see, our life is so much flux and flow and change and shift that we forget that God is eternal and unchanging. He is not a part of our flux and flow of time and space.

I remember I was getting ready to preach on the Ascension once. I'd never preached on the Ascension. And as I thought, there may not be a good sermon in this somewhere.

I preached on his birth, I preached on his baptism, I preached on the beginning of his ministry, I preached on his death, I preached on his resurrection. There's bound to be theology in this. So while I was sweating on it and not getting very far, I had two crazy thoughts.

One of them was, when he left, how far did he go? And the other question was, how long did it take him to get there? And then I backed up and thought, well, you stupid donkey. How far is a space question? And he's not trapped in space. You and I are.

And how long is a time question? And he's not trapped in time. Those questions don't apply to him because he is the eternal one. He's not trapped in time and space.

Time and space are trapped in him. And because of that, time will never take away a transgression that you and I ever commit because it's a relationship with the eternal one. Now that explains some things that at times I have had some difficulty understanding.

You know, you can commit a sin and then forget you've committed it. It may be something so heinous that your mind will deliberately wipe it out so you can exist. But the fact you've forgotten it doesn't mean that it goes away.

I remember once I was teaching a Bible class and there was a lady who came who was not a member of our congregation. And one Sunday morning, or one morning, I got a phone call from her, not a Sunday, and she was very flippant with me over the phone, insultingly so from my point of view. And I started to hang up.

And as I started to hang up, I thought, now, wait a minute, she's never done that with me before. And I realized she was in profound distress. And so instead of hanging up, I said, I'll be there in just a few moments.

And in five minutes, I was crunching her doorbell. And when I walked in her living room, she was in distress. And I said, what's wrong? And she looked at me and said, it's been 18 years.

And I thought I'd forgotten it. I trusted that everybody involved had long forgotten it. But it's back.

And I'm the filthiest, vilest piece of flesh on the face of the earth. I said, you're a member of the board of the best example of Gothic architecture in this part of the world. She said, oh, I know that.

But they don't know. I'm the vilest piece of human flesh that you've ever met. It was 18 years ago.

And I hoped it was gone. She said, do you know what brought it back? I said, no. She said, it's that lousy Bible class that you teach.

You see, she came into the presence of the Word of God. And when she came into the presence of the Word of God, she came into the presence of God. You see, the 18 years of forgetting simply told how far she was from God, not the unreality of her transgression.

Physical things will pass. Spiritual realities are enduring. Now, you will notice that Isaiah felt he was a pretty good guy until he met God in the temple.

And when he came into the presence of God, he cried out, woe is me. And he was a prophet. For I am undone.

I have seen the King. Now, what doesn't bother you when you're a long ways from God is no indication of its seriousness. It may simply be an indication of the hardness of our own hearts and the heedlessness of our spirits to eternal things.

And so it was that when we could not do anything about our sins, God decided to do something about it. And he did it in the cross. There is the symbol of what sin does to a person who is contaminated by it.

There is no question in the Scripture but that the Scripture indicates that sin has a deadly effect about it. If you will read the 18th chapter of Ezekiel, you will find that again and again it develops this theme, the soul that sinneth, it shall die. It is, in a sense, a commentary on that promise given to Adam and Eve in the garden.

In the day that you eat of the tree, in the day that you break my commandment, dying you will die. There will be no escape. It may not come immediately.

It may be postponed. But the postponement is no indication of its certainty. It is as certain as the nature of God and the existence of God.

Our familiar verse, like in Romans 6, 23, the wages of sin. Sin pays its rewards and the wages of sin is death. If you have any question, I dare you to sit down and read the book of Revelation through from beginning to end.

There you will begin to see that the Scripture is clear, that our transgressions are serious enough that they bring death to those that participate in them. So the cross lets us know the deadliness that killed him, and if our sins are not cared for by him, they will bring that same kind of alienation in us to God and to the holy and to the good, and will bring it eternally. Now, the cross speaks to us about the seriousness of our sins, and it speaks to us about the cost to God, but it also speaks to us about the way that our sins are taken away.

Let me take you back for just a moment to something in Hebrew that has been very helpful to me. It is interesting how a word sometimes will bring a truth alive to you. The strongest word in Hebrew for to forgive is a word which basically means to bear.

Now, there is another word which is used, but it is not the strong one. The strong one is the word that speaks of a load that has been on one person being placed on another, and that word means so literally bear that translators in the Old Testament oftentimes have difficulty knowing how to translate it. Do you translate it, surely he hath borne our sins, or surely he hath forgiven? Blessed is the man whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man whose trespasses are. Do you translate it forgiven, or do you translate it borne? But what the cross says is that there God took upon himself our sins, and when he took upon himself our sins, the damage they will do to us if we are not forgiven was done to him, and he took that damage in our place. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

Now, you know, that speaks about something else that we were talking about. If our transgressions have eternal significance, isn't it a marvelous thing that the atonement is the same way? In the very same way

that the sin of Adam came into existence and had a life of its own for thousands of years until Christ came and died for him, the incredible thing is that something happened in the heart of God 1,900, almost 2,000 years ago now. Something happened in the heart of God that is so transcending to time that its benefits reach out across all of these centuries to the likes of you and me.

And the end result is that a sin that I committed yesterday, if I turn to him and lay it upon him, God, not able to speak it away and say, That's all right, Dennis, forget it, he says, Wait a minute. I took care of that 1,900 years ago, and when I took care of it, it was an event in time, but it was an event also in eternity. And that atonement is as applicable now to you as it was in the day that Christ gave his life.

We deal with eternal realities when we deal with sin and with atonement. And there's no other religion in the world like it. A little wonder that Paul said, When I came to you, I determined not to know anything among you except the good news.

And what is the gospel that I have to give to you? Christ died for our sins back there, and that atonement is applicable now. And the end result is that every sin that you've ever committed now, in this moment, can know what it means to be forgiven and to be removed, and you can be as free as if you had never offended your Lord. I was a seminary student, and I was speaking in a little church in southern Ohio with an Asbury Seminary pastor.

And in the course of the revival meetings, we visited many people in the community. So one day we had lunch with a doctor in the community. It was a delightful time in his home.

He was Sunday School superintendent, a member of the board of the church and very active in the church. But he was a busy man, and so we didn't have long at lunch. But I found out that the next day was his day off.

And so I went to see him and sat down in his study, and we chatted together. And I finally got around to what I wanted to say, and I said, Doc, I want to ask you a question. Do you know Christ as your personal Savior and Lord? Oh, he said, I'm a member of the church.

I'm a Sunday School superintendent. He said, I didn't ask you that, Doc. I want to know if you know Christ as your personal Savior from sin.

Well, he said, I certainly ought to. I need to. I said, yes, I understand that, but I want to go back to my question.

And he sort of danced around another time or two, and we developed enough rapport that I felt I could do it. And I looked at him and I said, Doc, let me pin your ears right flat back. Could you honestly say at this present moment that every sin you've ever committed is forgiven? He dropped his head.

He said, Ken Law, if you're going to put it that straight, I'm not sure I could say yes. And I sort of took my courage in my hands and looked at him and said, Doc, that's an unfortunate thing for a Sunday School superintendent to have to say, isn't it? And he looked back at me and said, yes, I guess it is. I gave the invitation that night.

And when I gave the invitation, I asked for hands for prayer and he raised his hand. It looked as if it weighed about 500 pounds, the effort he had to get it pushed up. And he didn't get it very high.

But when I invited people for prayer, he came. I didn't have a chance to speak to him, to pray with him, but afterwards I got to him. I'll never forget the way he shot out his hand and grabbed my hand.

There was no dancing around. It was direct and straightforward. He pumped my hand and squeezed it and he said, Dennis, I don't have to hide from you now.

God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven me every sin I've ever committed. And it's the first time I've ever consciously been free. Now, you know, the amazing thing is that God did something 1900 years ago that is as present now as it was then, because it is an act in the life of God, and that's eternal.

Your life and mine changes. But in the heart of God tonight, because of the cross, there is forgiveness. Because if you look deep enough into the heart of God tonight, you will find that the same symbol that we rally around is in the heart of the nature of deity.

It's the cross. God sacrificing himself for us. Now, you know what troubles me, and that's the reason I do not want to close this series without dealing with this.

There are many of us who never receive from his hand the freedom from guilt and from burden and the freedom from bondage that he executed and continues to execute for us. Do you know the forgiveness of sin? Do you know freedom from the tyranny of sin? There is an answer, and it's in Christ and in his atonement for you. Every sin you've ever committed, he will bear and carry away, and you will be free.

And the bondage that sin always brings, he can break and release you. And it would be a tragedy if there was one person in our midst who let this service pass without the joyous freedom of the children of God. Will you bow your heads with me? Now, Father, don't let us be unmindful of what you've done for us.

You made us in the first place, and then you atoned for our sins in Christ. You took our sins into yourself, that we might be freed from our sins and that your life might become ours. But then more than that, on September the 21st, 1986, you come to us out of your eternity into our time to give us eternal life and to give us an eternal redemption.

How we ought to thank you and how we ought to seize the offer of grace that you extend to us. And so tonight, in the light of what you've done to free us, we pray that there will not be a person in our midst who will be free to go tonight without letting you do now what you did then, without letting that cross that you carry in your heart even now, without letting it do its effective work within us. Bring somebody to freedom and release tonight, and we will give you praise in Jesus' name.

Amen. you

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