

# The Second Message of the Cross

by E.A. Johnston

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel in its purity and proper order, highlighting the need to preach the first message of the cross (God will punish sin) before the second message of the cross (our sin substitute, Jesus Christ).*

**Duration:** 21:17

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 5:19

**Topics:** "Cross of Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel in its purity and proper order. He highlights the first message of the cross, which is the fact that God will punish sin. The diluted gospel being preached today fails to mention the demands of Christ, the cross, and the evidence of salvation through a life of holiness. The biblical message of the cross is a scandal to the natural man, but it is the true gospel that offers a remedy for sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The preacher urges believers to seek the things above and set their affections on Christ, emphasizing that through faith in Christ, we are reconciled to God and justified in His sight.

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## Transcript

Last time we spoke on the importance of preaching the gospel in its purity and proper order. And we described the first message of the cross, which is the fact that God will punish sin. And today, we're going to cover that second message of the cross, our sin substitute, Jesus Christ.

We mentioned last time that people today just don't believe in a God who will punish sin. And the preaching of your day and mine has mainly been the second message of the cross, that Jesus died for sin. But people aren't interested in that message until they see the stark fact that God will punish sin.

Nobody is screaming for mercy now because they just don't believe God will punish sin. But if God won't punish sin, there's no need for a Savior. They have nothing to be saved from.

And people don't want to be saved today because they just don't want to be done with sin. So we've changed our message and our pulpits to accommodate them a little better and have shrunken God down to our size. And we have whittled out for ourselves a little God who just loves everybody and won't punish sin.

But listen, friends, until we get back to preaching the gospel in its purity and proper order, few are going to feel the need of being saved. But once we preach the first message of the cross, that God will punish sin, and after they see that, then we can come along and preach the second message of the cross, which is a substitute for sin, Jesus Christ. The following verses of scripture from 2 Corinthians 5, 19, and 20 are a declaration of both these facts.

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. We pray you in Christ's head, be ye reconciled to God.

There had to be a reconciliation between an offended God and sinful man. The mediator, Jesus Christ, paid the price on Calvary's cross for our sins. Through faith in Christ, we are reconciled to God and are justified in his sight, standing no longer under his condemnation for sin, but under his blood and the forgiveness of sin.

The apostle Paul sums up the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, verses 3 and 4. For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures. And that, friends, is what separates and distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Listen, Buddha lived, died, and was buried.

Confucius lived, died, and was buried. Muhammad lived, died, and was buried. Jesus lived, died, and was buried.

But he rose again, he reigns in glory. We serve a resurrected Lord. Jesus is a living Lord who reigns on a heavenly throne.

Well, who put Christ on that heavenly throne? God the Father. Listen to Ephesians 1.20. Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. And, friends, Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, and he got there by way of a bloody cross.

But many church members today don't act like they believe that. They act like Christ is still in the grave. Their profession doesn't get in the way of their daily living.

They take Christ as Savior. They rest everything they have on the death of Christ for sin. And they go on and live like devils in sin, and believe they were alright, and that God is alright with them.

But listen, friends. Jesus is a Savior from sin. He came to save his people from their sins.

He didn't hang on a bloody cross and pay your sin debt by his death, so you could still serve Satan and sin. No, sir. Christ came to recover man's lost holiness by dying for sinful man, and to carve his image on them as blood-bought followers of the Lamb.

The Lord Jesus lays down his heart's blood to redeem souls out of the hand of sin and Satan, that they may be free to serve God in a life of holiness, for without holiness no one shall see the Lord. But many today in our churches deny the Lord who bought them with the ransom of his death. They ignore the princely sum of that ransom, which was Christ's blood and his death.

They still hug their sins in open rebellion against the Holy God, and claim that grace has granted them heaven, and they can live any way they choose here on earth. And they fail to grasp the fact that Christ sits on a heavenly throne, and if you desire him, you must bow to him and surrender to his lordship there. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, and those who do the works of the devil are enemies of the cross of Christ.

The Bible teaching of what salvation is, is nothing more or less than God reproducing the perfect character of Jesus Christ in a human being. God picking him up out of his sinful condition and making him like the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says in Galatians, My little children, of whom I travail and birth again, until Christ be formed in you.

That's what Christianity is. Christ in you, the hope of glory. Gospel faith is coming with a thirsty appetite to be made like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not still lying in that tomb like Buddha. He rose again. He's not in the grave where you can take part of him for salvation and then walk all over him and treat him any way you choose because you were saved by grace.

No, sir. He sits on a heavenly throne. The gospel is a proclamation of a full and free salvation to every repentant sinner through the work of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary.

And this is the second message of the cross. But we must be careful when we preach the gospel not to offer reconciliation and peace to those who wish to continue in defiance of God's way of holiness. For the gospel is not only an invitation to come to Christ, but a command to repent.

God now commanded all men everywhere to repent. We must warn sinners of the vengeance of God which awaits those who obey not the gospel in flame and fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, friends, I fear many today have based their salvation on a fact and not a relationship.

Many have merely believed in the death of Christ. But we are not saved by believing in the death of Christ, but on the Christ who died. And that Christ sits on a heavenly throne.

He is a living Lord. And true salvation occurs when we enter a vital union with that living Lord. To say we are wed to Christ and then deny Him with our lives is to be deceived.

For the gospel does not make light of sin, nor should we. The gospel reveals God's terrible sword of justice when He smote His beloved Son in order to deliver us from the penalty and slavery of sin. Calvary is a varied picture of how much God hates sin.

Listen, friends, this business of knowing a Christ which has relieved men of their sense of guilt but leaves men of knowing nothing of a living Lord is the creation of another gospel which is not the gospel of God. Listen to the wise words of the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon who said to his students who were training for the ministry, listen to his words. If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord's will but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumption but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved.

Do you imagine that the gospel is magnified or God glorified by going to the worldlings and telling them that they may be saved at this moment by simply accepting Christ as their Savior while they are wedded to

their idols and their hearts are still in love with sin? If I do so, I tell them a lie, pervert the gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. In other words, friends, the Christ of the Bible is Lord of all and a salvation that does not enthrone Him is not God's so great salvation. The gospel that leaves men knowing nothing experimentally of a living Lord is not the Christ of the Bible but a Christ of our own making.

The Christ of the Bible must reign and He must reign in your life if you are to be truly saved. The whole emphasis of the New Testament is Christ living in you. It has been said, a Christ not in you is a Christ not yours.

We must proclaim a gospel that demands men to come to Christ on bent knees and with surrendered lives. You see, friends, Christianity is a way of life. It is more than making a profession of faith, more than being baptized and joining a church.

It involves a crucified life whereby we follow a crucified Savior and it is a complete commitment to the will of God. We must not give men a false hope but a sure refuge. Christ is the gospel and to be saved we must possess that Christ of the gospel and He must possess us in a vital union with Him.

You see, friends, in your day and mine, many preach a gospel which offends no one. Where has the offense of the gospel gone? The preaching of the cross is scandalous. The apostle Paul declared, but we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The true gospel will transform and change a man and keep on changing that man until he is conformed to the very image of God's only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament declares that the preaching of the cross is foolishness and an offense to the natural mind and to preach Christ and Him crucified is a stone that will cause stumbling. The gospel is a stumbling stone and an offense to the unregenerate man.

Listen, friends, we must get back to the message of the cross in our day so that people can be disturbed by the God of the message of the cross and the power of the Holy Ghost. Listen to the following story. It still grieves me to this day.

I used to have a man in my Sunday school class. He had a lovely wife and children and he attended church regularly every week, but it was known within that church that this man was a frequenter of strip clubs. He could be found on any given night in a strip club in my town and on Sunday he would be faithfully in church.

He honestly believed he was a saved individual and this was sadly reinforced by other church members. They told him he needed to quit going to these adult clubs and just commit to following Christ in a more serious walk. But this man continued in his sin because he enjoyed it to the shame of his family and to the tarnishing of his church testimony.

But the main point I want to bring out of this story is the fact that most of the people in that church believed this man was saved, but just not following the Lord like he should. And that, friends, is a picture of evangelism in our day. We tell sinners to accept Jesus as Savior and then we pat them on the back and welcome them into our churches.

We fail to mention the demands of the Christ of the gospel, the cross, and the life of the believer, and the evidence of salvation through a life of holiness. The message of the diluted gospel today is producing

products that mirror the message and show no evidence of salvation. But the biblical message of the cross is a scandal to the natural man.

In offense, Jesus said to his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Jesus told his followers, If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love.

The great British evangelist, George Whitefield, while preaching in America in 1740, was asked by a New England minister, Mr. Whitefield, how many converts have you had while you have been here in America? To this, the great Whitefield replied, I don't know, sir, but I shall return to these parts in a year or two and shall look for the evidence of their salvation. And that's true, friends. True salvation displays the fruit of a life lived unto God in holiness because we are given a new nature when we are saved.

And in that new nature, the principle of holiness is planted within the heart of an old rotten sinner. The word of God says in Ezekiel, And I will give them one heart and I will put a new spirit within you. And I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and will give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them.

And they shall be my people and I will be their God. Oh, friends, let's get back to preaching the gospel in its purity and proper order. Allow me to close with the following story.

Years ago, when I was a young man still in my 20s, I visited the ancient ruins of Ephesus. It was a thrilling experience to walk among those ruins. Perhaps some of you have traveled there and seen that excavated city of Ephesus.

I walked where the Apostle Paul walked. I walked where the Apostle John walked. It was an adventure to retrace the footsteps as I walked the length and breadth of that ancient city.

I had a tour guide lead me around, and he told me about how the ancient city of Ephesus operated. He took me to a place among the ruins, which he said was an agora. He said that this was an outdoor marketplace, kind of like a mall that we would have today.

It was a marketplace where items were bought and sold. Slaves were also sold in the agora. Well, years later, I learned the meaning of that word in regard to redemption.

For the word redemption is best explained by several Greek words, and they each have the root word agora. Take that word, it's spelled A-G-O-R-A, and make the word agorazo. In the Greek, the word agorazo means redemption, and in the Greek, that word means that Jesus entered the marketplace of sin and bought me by his blood and with his death.

That is redemption. Now, add the little preposition ek in front of the word agorazo, and you have ekagorazo. Ek means to take out of something, to remove something out of.

So this word for redemption, ekagorazo, means that Jesus not only entered the marketplace of sin and purchased me by his blood and with his death, but he removed me from that marketplace of sin. He set me free from its dominion. You see, friends, a truly redeemed individual has experienced a double cure.

That person is saved from the penalty of sin, and is saved from the power of sin. To be saved means we are brought out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light and life. We are given a new heart

and are changed so that we are no longer servants of Satan, but the bond slaves of Jesus Christ.

Amen? And when we preach and share the message of the gospel, let us preach the full counsel of God and show lost sinful man his ruined condition before that just and holy God. And let us invite that sinner to come to Christ and repent, submitting to the claims of Christ laid out in the message of the cross, which is twofold, God will punish sin, and he has offered a remedy for sin, a sin substitute in the person of his only beloved son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who bled on a gory cross and died, and was buried, and who rose again, and who now sits at the right hand of the Father in glory. We are told in Colossians chapter 3, If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. And that, friends, is the gospel, the twofold message of the cross.

God will punish sin, and there is a remedy for sin in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. For we are either dead in sin, or dead to sin. May we preach the gospel again in its purity and proper order, all for God's glory.

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