

# Here We Stand - Concerning the Death of Christ and Man's Salvation

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The death of Christ is central to the Christian faith because it was deemed to be something essential to the salvation of men and women from sin.*

**Duration:** 1:03:36

**Scripture:** Matthew 11:28, Acts 20:21, Romans 5:10, 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, 1 Corinthians 2:2, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Peter 2:24

**Topics:** "Salvation"

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## Description

The sermon transcript emphasizes the centrality of the death of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and in the minds of the evangelists. The speaker highlights the importance of the cross and the death of Jesus throughout the Scriptures. The sermon also mentions Paul's words in Galatians 6:14, where he expresses his humility and refusal to boast except in the cross of Christ. The sermon concludes by discussing how Jesus himself appointed symbols, such as the Lord's Supper, to remind the Christian church of his death.

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## Transcript

Let us turn together to the subject that has been billed for this evening. We continue with our general topic, Here We Stand, in which we are dealing with a number of basic Christian tenets proclaimed by the historic Christian church from the beginning and heralded forth very faithfully over the years from this pulpit here in Knox. And tonight we come to the question of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as it relates to the salvation of lost sinners.

Here we stand concerning the death of Christ. Now, it is taken as self-evident, one hardly needs to say this, that we are not pretending, not even pretending to be giving either a definitive or an exhaustive statement of these great truths, but we are simply turning to some of the essential features in each of them in turn. When we come, for example, to the subject before us tonight, it is so vast and so complex and so interspersed throughout the whole of the Scriptures, it is a subject that could occupy us for some considerable time.

And that, of course, we cannot do. Nevertheless, there are some things which perhaps we do well to consider in the course of one sermon such as this. I want to begin by stressing the obvious fact to all readers of the Gospel, namely the fact of the centrality of the cross of Christ throughout the New

Testament.

The centrality of the cross, or of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I want to distinguish here between two things. First of all, the centrality of the cross in the thinking of our Lord himself, and then in the thought of his apostles and servants and heralds.

We shall look at these two in turn. First of all, when our Lord set about his public ministry and began to teach, it was evident that he thought of his coming, his pending death in Jerusalem, as he foretold it, he thought of it as something that was absolutely crucial to his ministry here upon earth. He thought of it as something central.

And it is in that way that he introduced it to his disciples. Jesus himself saw his death to be not only an integral part of his life's mission, but the central ingredient. Very early in his life, as you know, the early chapters of John's Gospel represent the earliest segment in our Lord's public ministry.

There, as part of his dialogue with Nicodemus, he early said, As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. So right at the beginning of his public ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ was aware that he had come to die. And he must accomplish that for which he had come.

There was this divine necessity about it all, and it was central in his thinking, in his planning, even there. I tell you the truth, he says, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life.

And then he goes on and he adds to that, if a man eats of this bread, he will live forever. And then this. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Following the confession of faith made by Peter, perhaps on behalf of the others, but made by Peter at Caesarea Philippi, our Lord referred to the fact of his coming death with increasing regularity, adding something new invariably at each new reference, with each new reference. Thereafter it became a regular feature of his teaching to tell his disciples about his coming death. Despite the fact that he did tell them, however, it seems that they could hardly take it in.

So that when at last the cross emerged, they were nonplussed, unprepared. And how much more unprepared they would have been had he not from the very outset tried to prepare them for that event. Following the cross and following the resurrection, of course, the Holy Spirit brought back to them the things that our Lord had already taught them.

And from that vantage point they were able to see the whole series of events leading up to the death of our Lord and see them in perspective. So his teaching was not in vain. We read therefore in Matthew chapter 16, from that time, that is from Caesarea Philippi, from that time Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed.

And on the third day he was raised again. I am the good shepherd, he says, the good shepherd who gives, who lays down his life for the sheep. And again later on in chapter 12, he says, I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.

He said, this adds John, in order to show the kind of death he was going to die. Moreover, our Lord's death was so central to his thoughts about his own ministry that he appointed symbols that would

specifically remind the Christian church throughout the ages of this cardinal, this central fact of the faith. I don't know whether this grips us as it ought.

How could our Lord's disciples ever forget him? Even so, whatever the answer is to that question, he made provision that his people should remember him in one specific way, very especially, when he broke the bread and he poured out the wine and he instituted the Lord's supper and he said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. This is my blood of the new covenant.

As often as you drink this cup, do so in remembrance of me. In other words, I want you to remember me not as the teacher that went with you from place to place, though I don't want you to forget that, but I don't want you primarily either to remember me as the miracle worker, but I want you to remember me as the one who died. I want my death to be as central in your thought, as central in your memory, as it is central in my existence.

Central in the thought and planning of our Lord, we also notice its centrality in the thinking and in the preaching of the apostles. Now you have noticed, I'm quite sure, in your reading of the New Testament, how over a third of the space in the four Gospels, taking them together, over a third of the space, over a third of the chapters, the aggregate chapters, is taken up with the last week in the life of our Lord, which involves matters immediately leading to his death, the fact of his death and resurrection. The whole work and teaching of three to three and a half years are packed into the other two thirds.

What a remarkable imbalance. Why should it be so? There is only one answer. His death and the last week of his life occupies so much space because of its cardinal importance in the mind of our Lord and in the writing of the evangelists.

To them, the death of Christ was central. It was central also to their experience. Time forbids me to go into this.

Shall we take Paul's words as typical? I believe they were, though we do not find exactly, precisely the same words as Galatians 6.14 elsewhere. But we find the sentiments, we find the spirit, we find the attitude. In Galatians 6.14 Paul said, May I never boast.

God forbid that I should glory, says the King James. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. It was central to their preaching.

At the heart of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost lay the fact and meaning of the death of Christ upon the cross. Therefore, he says, let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.

And so we could go on as far as Peter is concerned. I suppose Paul's words to the Corinthians are classical and almost universally known among believing Christian people. You remember how he wrote, Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom.

But we, 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.

And then he proceeds in the next chapter. When I came to you brothers, he says, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom. As I proclaim to you the testimony about God.

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now the same point could be well illustrated by references from the epistles of both Peter and John. Peter at one time had no place for the cross and he tried to dissuade his Lord from going to the cross.

But you read his epistles. You will find that Peter has had a tremendous change, a gigantic change, a transformation of outlook. And the cross looms large in the writings that bear his name.

Moreover, we might add this, though it is not as important as the biblical testimony. But it is important, you know, for us to realize that immediately after the apostles died out and when Christians began to build churches, that's on to the third, I believe in the fourth century of our era. But when they began to build churches, almost invariably they would build their churches according to the sign of the cross.

Now we have it here in miniature. The idea is that you have a long section and then two other sections going off. And most of the ancient churches during that era particularly were built as it were on the basis of the shape of the cross.

Not only that, when the Christians came to be baptized, they were always baptized in the early days apparently. Invariably baptized under the sign of the cross. This is very ancient.

Not only that, when they came to be buried at last, it was a very rare thing for a Christian man or Christian woman to be buried without someone leaving the sign of the cross on the grave of the tomb. Now you may say, why am I referring to this? My sole reason for referring to it is not to get you to make the sign of the cross in any way or other, but just to point out the fact that this was central to the thinking not only of our Lord and of his apostles, but of the church in post-apostolic times. Now that leads me to the most important thing I want to deal with tonight.

If the cross was so central, why? Why was it? And I want now to say a few words about its necessity, the necessity of the cross. Having seen that Jesus thought of his death as pivotal to his work on earth, we may justifiably conclude that he deemed it a necessary ingredient, indeed the necessary ingredient, in the performance of his Father's will. That, I think, is clear from a passage we have quoted already about his going up to Jerusalem where he said to his disciples, he must go to Jerusalem to suffer many things, he must go to Jerusalem to be killed.

There was that necessity about it. The angel on the resurrection morning reminded the women who came to the tomb of that same necessity. He is not here, said the angel, he is risen.

Remember how he told you while he was still with you in Galilee, the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again. But he has the same message, the necessity of the cross. It was central because it was deemed to be something essential.

Now how can we explain this necessity? Why was the cross a necessity? Now will you bear with me as we try to go into this just a little. First of all, the necessity emerged because of the avowed purpose of our Lord's mission here upon earth. The cross was necessary.

His death was essential because of what he had come to do. The goal of his incarnation could only be achieved by this means. The drinking of this cup was a necessity because, as the angel announced to Joseph before his birth, he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus said in Luke 19.10, he said that he had come to seek and to save that which was lost. Had he set his goals lower, his death might never have been necessary. But because salvation, the salvation of lost men and women was the avowed goal of his becoming man, it was necessary for the Lord incarnate to die.

There is a hymn which says, it's not in our hymnory, and I'm glad it's not there, though it has some other words that are quite beautiful. But it asks the question, whether there was any other way that God could take to save us, and then it answers, I cannot say. Well, the Bible does clearly say, there was no other way.

Our Lord, having set himself to achieve this goal of saving men and women from their sin, rescuing men from the dominion of Satan, had to die. Had his goals been lower, his passion, his suffering, his sorrows, his anguish might never have been necessary. But because he loved us, so as to seek us and to save us, the cross was necessary.

But now we must proceed. Secondly, the necessity of Christ's death in order to save us sinners, was itself determined by the nature and the gravity of the problem from which we needed to be saved. The death of Christ might not have been necessary to save us from a minor catastrophe, even though it be a catastrophe, but a minor one.

But our sin had involved us, not in a minor, but in a major catastrophe. What was the predicament of mankind that necessitated nothing short of the incarnation and the death of the Son of God, ere it could be resolved? Well, we answer in a nutshell, it was the problem of sin. But I want to add, hastily, sin as seen through the eyes of God.

Sin not as understood by ordinary men and women, which is a very negligible thing. You ask the man of the street, what is sin? And he'll shrug his shoulders, it doesn't mean much to him. Indeed, let me come nearer home.

There are many people in the Christian church, and you ask them what sin is, and is it serious? What real difference does it make to human life and to death? And you will find not only varied answers, but the most superficial. So, I want to add, the thing that necessitated the death of Christ was the predicament of man due to sin, but sin as God sees sin. We shall be eternally indebted to God, not only for the revelation of His Son given us in the Scriptures, but also for the revelation of sin given us in the Scriptures and given us in His Son.

Did we not know what God thinks of sin? The very way of salvation would be enigmatic. It would mystify us beyond our capacity to understand anything about it. But because it has pleased Him in His Word and in His Son to let us see something of what this awful thing is, now we can in some little measure understand the predicament of the human race.

Requiring the death of the Son of God for any man or woman to be saved. Now you say to me, what is there so terrible about sin? Well, tonight this is not my subject, but it is part of it. And I just want to say two of the most important things that I can think of about the nature of sin.

Let me remind you, there are many, many other things that the Bible says about sin, all of which are important. But I want to suggest to you that these two are probably most important in this connection. One, sin is rebellion against God.

Now, I don't think it is possible for a man to say anything which has more serious ramifications than that. Sin is rebellion. It is the raising up of a standard of rebellion and saying, I will not do what you ask me or what you command me.

But it is aggravated by this, you see, that the person who says, I will not do what you require of me, is a creature who owes his very existence and his very next breath to the God to whom he says, I will not obey you. Your life and mine, your next breath and mine is in the hand of God to give or to withhold. You cannot boast yourself of an hour, let alone a day.

My friend, the Scriptures tell us, let not a man boast of tomorrow. Tomorrow is not in your hand, not even the next hour nor the next breath. It is the Lord's.

But the God that has made us, the God that has sustained us, the God that has blessed us, the God that has kept us, the God that has sent His Son to die for us, we will defy Him and insofar as we can, in our minds we will dethrone Him. But we cannot dethrone the Almighty. Praise God for that.

You cannot do that, you see. His throne is fixed in the heavens and you and I cannot get at Him. And you cannot dethrone Him and you and I must face Him at last.

But in your minds you can, in your thinking you can, in your desiring you can. And you can say, I will not have this God to rule over me. I will not listen to His Word.

I will not read His Word. I'll shut the Bible and I'll not go to church and I'll not listen to any sermons about Him and I'll not have any Christian influence and I'll shut the whole of my life away from Him. You can do that.

Do you notice what is happening? It is man raising up a standard of rebellion and literally, insofar as he is able, within the limits of his finitude, he is taking God from his throne and he is putting himself on the throne where God ought to be. Sin is a turning of things morally upside down. It is sin that has involved this world in a state of toxic turvidum where God is dishonored and man is deified.

That's sin. Now the result of sin as rebellion is therefore essentially far-reaching. It is nothing short of catastrophic.

It results in the deepest alienation between man and God. The Apostle Paul's language in that passage that Mr. Lowe read for us, I hope you noticed it. I remember when that first dawned upon me, I was listening to a Welsh preacher and he read the Scriptures before he started expounding them and he insisted on reading the passage twice over.

And when he came to that passage which says that we were enemies, I felt as if heaven had been opened and a shaft of light had come into my soul that had never lit up the reality and the ugliness of my sin to that extent before. Enemies! We were enemies of God. Sin had transformed the creature made after God's image into an enemy of the God that made him and sustains him and loved him with an everlasting love.

Listen to Paul's words. Get them for yourselves tonight. Romans 5, verses 6 and 10.

Christ died for the ungodly. When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. And then go on to chapter 8 and verses 6 and 7 and listen to this comment.

The mind of sinful man is death. The sinful mind is hostile to God, has enmity towards God. That's the point.

It does not submit to God's law nor indeed can it. Now there's something terrible there. In the mind of the sinner there has emerged not only a hostility against God but he has set himself, you and I by nature have set ourselves upon a throne and we can't get down again, we can't climb down.

We have assumed a self-importance. We have assumed the role of deity for ourselves and in and of ourselves we can't get off our pedestal. We can't think of ourselves other than as rulers.

As those who have the last say about ourselves and about the circumstances of life. In other words, we have taken God from his throne and we have placed ourselves there. Sin is rebellion against God.

Now the sin which is rebellion against God as well as many, many, many other things inescapably calls forth the wrath of God. Oh, this is an unwanted note, an unloved aspect of the Christian truth. But my friends, I must tell you about it tonight.

You and I cannot understand the biblical teaching about the death of Christ until we take this seriously, as seriously as God did. Listen to Paul in Romans 1.18. The wrath of God, he says, is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. There is emerging in this very present life, says Paul, there is emerging something which shows that God is angry with sin.

Now here we are on a very difficult slope. The wrath of God is so entirely different from the anger of man that the very reference of wrath in God kind of arouses some antipathy within us and we just can't take it in. Now here you've got to dissociate the wrath of God from every other kind of anger or wrath that you have ever read about or ever encountered.

You see, we humans are never more perverse and evil than in our expression of anger. And on that account, it is difficult for us even to envisage a just and holy anger. And anger is an unholy thing as far as we are concerned.

When we ourselves are angry, we tend to lose control of ourselves. We neither think clearly nor act wisely when we are angry. Our anger makes us unprincipled and most of us, when we come to think of it afterwards, are ashamed.

We lost our temper, we say. It was out of control. It wasn't under control at all.

It was outwith the sovereignty that we assume over it. Now, my friends, God's wrath is something completely different from that. God's wrath, on the other hand, is pure as His love, righteous as His every other action or reaction.

And this must be clearly understood. God doesn't lose His temper when He is angry. God is in control of His attributes and acts in the totality of His perfections as much when He condemns the wicked justly as when He justifies the ungodly by grace.

Now, you see, we have been fed on lies about God and especially about His wrath so that we have developed an antipathy against the very thought envisaged here. We have tended to isolate the love of God and to dwell upon the love of God and to neglect and even to forget that He is holy and righteous and

therefore has a holy antipathy against everything that is evil. We have tended to forget that, to brush it under the carpet and we do not think of it or bring it into consideration.

And to aggravate matters, of course, our very concept of God's love is other than what it is in Scripture. When we think of God's love, we think of it in some sentimental terms akin to the kind of thing that is called love in the world today. That is a caricature of the truth.

Now, the relevance of all this to our subject lies in the fact that God's anger is revealed against all sin and wickedness. God in His justice and holiness cannot other than condemn sin to be permanently excluded from His presence. Hence the greatness and the gravity of the human problem from which God's Son came to save us.

God in His holiness cannot be reconciled to sin in its ugliness and confusion. Therefore, sin must be cast away from His presence. And insofar as we cling to sin, we must go with the sin and Satan, who is its author, to the lake of fire.

But now that brings me thirdly to the price of achieving the salvation of sinners from the wrath of God revealed against us as well as from the ravages of sin experienced within us. The price of achieving that salvation was the death of Jesus Christ. Nothing else, nothing less could achieve this high end.

Oh, I say again, if Jesus had only come to teach us a few things about God, He needn't have died. If He'd only come to philosophize a little or theologize a little or teach us a little bit of psychology. He needn't have died, but He came to save.

To save you from the wrath of God which you and I deserve. And because of that, He, He, He even, He had to die. May the Spirit of God drive this home to our consciences tonight.

Well, now granted that He had to die, how can the death of Christ save us? Now, where as much is revealed in Scripture concerning this matter, it's quite another thing for us to be able to take in what is revealed. And even when we feel that we have collated all the evidence and all the teaching of Scripture, I think we need to be very humble about this and say that we can scarcely take it in. And I must say for myself, I feel more in that condition tonight than I ever did in my life.

Not that I doubt anything that Scripture says, but these massive declarations about the death of our Lord, bearing away our sin, I find so gigantic and so immense that I simply cannot begin to fathom what they mean. Don't let us then assume that we've got that kind of inside knowledge that can put the screws and all the bolts together and tie every little piece up neatly here and there as if we knew all about it and there is no mystery. I tell you, there is mystery here.

Profound mystery. And the great intellects of the years have worshipped before it. Don't let our pygmy minds deceive us into believing that we can understand it all.

But that is no reason why we shouldn't read what has been revealed. What is revealed belongs to us. What is not revealed belongs to our God and to His counsels forever.

What is revealed? Now here I must say, I want to say two or three things. And I'm going to use some theological terms tonight. I don't like doing so, but I can't find alternatives.

But I'll be clear to try and say what they mean in case there is someone here to whom they are new. Now, first of all, the death of Jesus was unique and was able to accomplish salvation because for one thing, or two things, it was, and these are technical terms, it was substitutionary in nature and penal in character. I'm bringing those two together.

You say, what really does that mean? Well, what it means is this, that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was not an ordinary death. He didn't die from disease. He didn't die from an accident, as we say.

He didn't die because he ran across the road in front of a bus or something. He laid down his life as an atoning sacrifice to bear the penalty that our sin deserved. And he did it instead of us, substitutionally.

He became our substitute. Taking in his death upon the cross the quality of death that our sins deserved. Now, Paul very crisply puts this in 2 Corinthians 5.21 when he says, God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin.

God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin. He knew no sin, yet he was made sin for us. There is an illustration of substitution written into the very circumstances of our Lord's death.

And even though it is an incidental kind of evidence to the principle embedded in the New Testament it is not a major strand of the evidence. But I nevertheless want to mention it tonight because it's so simple and perhaps it helps us to get what this implies. You remember that there had been condemned to death by crucifixion a man called Barabbas.

We don't know precisely what the total nature of the charges against Barabbas had been but we do know that he was found guilty and that he was held as a prisoner until he would be finally crucified. But at the feast it had been a practice to deliver, to let free to liberate one of the prisoners that the crowd, the people, the Jews required. And they would choose the person they wanted to have freedom.

You remember how Pilate offered them two alternatives. He says, now whom then will you have, Barabbas or will you have Jesus? Now let me add this. It was customary, so I gather, on reasonably good authority that everyone who was crucified was responsible for making his own cross.

And it is therefore reasonable to assume that Barabbas had been responsible for making his own cross of wood. And the cross was ready and Barabbas was about to be crucified when something suddenly happened overnight. And Jesus was brought from one court to another and the decision was made that he should be crucified and Pilate delivered him over and suddenly Barabbas was released, Jesus was sent to death.

Now you notice the juxtaposition of the two. Barabbas was going to his certain death as the unjust criminal, guilty. Jesus the innocent need not have died.

But at that last hour there was a transposition of positions. Jesus took Barabbas's place on Calvary's brow and probably died on the very gibbet, on the very cross that Barabbas would have died on. He died in his place.

Our Lord, although sinless, early identified himself with sinners as the New Testament makes clear. He did this in his baptism whilst he was later known as a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Luke 7.34, as early as that.

And then later on we are told in Luke 15 that the Pharisees and the elders they really had a jibe at Jesus because he welcomed sinners and ate with them. Prior to his betrayal and his death Jesus said that the prophecy of Isaiah 53 and verse 12 was to be fulfilled in himself. Now let me quote from Luke 22:37. It is written, says Jesus, and he was numbered with the transgressors.

And I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. He identified himself with sinners in their problem, in their need, in their tragedy. He so identified himself with sinners that Peter could say he himself bore our sins on his own body to the tree.

Now this identification with sinners thus went so far as his taking the place of sinners in the death that he died. The death that Jesus died was not his own death. He was not subject to death.

Death is the wage of sin. Physical death was unnecessary. Physical death came into the world because of sin.

Jesus had no sin. Physical death was not due to him. But there is an element of death in his death which is something quite different from physical death.

He did physically die. He did physically suffer. But there is an element in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ which is utterly beyond this.

When we overhear him cry out of an anguish of soul, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? What is that? What is that? Have you ever listened to that cry as it comes from the gospel records? Have you ever listened and pondered and asked the reason? What on earth is this? What is that? Have you ever listened to that cry as it comes from the gospel records? Have you ever listened and pondered and asked the reason? What on earth is this? Now listen my friend. Over and over again the father had said concerning his son, This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Jesus had taken the cup of Calvary into his hands to drink it, simply because he was sure it was the father's will.

If it be possible, he said, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. And the father said, I do not take it from you.

It is necessary. There is no other way to perform that which you have come to do. Jesus came therefore and with a whole heartedness embraced the cross itself.

What then is the reason for this excruciating anguish? Whereby he feels that his father has turned his back upon him and forsaken him. Where has it come from? My friend, there is only one answer to that. There was no sin in him to occasion the father to turn his back upon him, but there was sin upon him.

He was the Lamb of God who had come to bear away the sin of the world. And as he bore your sin and mine upon the cross, the sin of our enmity against God, the sin that deserved his holy anger in our being eternally cast away, Jesus felt something of the bleakness and the blackness of darkness and anguish of hell. Jesus saves us because he identified himself so intimately with us as to bear in his own body and in his own soul the consequences of our sin, substitutionary and penal.

Secondly, the death of Jesus Christ was unique because it was a propitiatory death. Now those of you who use the King James will find that in a number of places the word propitiation or its equivalent. Paul expresses this truth most clearly in a passage in Romans chapter 3. And the language in the New International Version is a little different, but here it is from the NIV.

In Romans 3.25 we read this amazing statement. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. God presented him as a sacrifice, a sacrifice of atonement.

The word atonement and propitiation are very near to one another. Now in the footnote to the New International Version there is a little explanation. Instead of the words sacrifice of atonement, it has in the footnote, or as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin.

That explains the meaning of the term propitiation. When we propitiate God, we do something that averts his holy indignation or his anger. When Jesus died, he caused the anger of God, the righteous indignation of God, to be turned aside.

Now there was that character then, that aspect of the death of our Lord, that made it compatible with God's justice and holiness as well as his grace to pardon the penitent sinner. I wonder whether the problem is clear to you. See the real problem is this.

How can a just and holy God, the God who made the law and revealed it to men, how can the God who is holy and just and whose justice and holiness is expressed in his law, how can he forgive the lawbreaker without appearing to say that his law is unimportant and it doesn't matter if you break it? Or if you want it in Paul's words, according to the King James Version, how can God be just and the justifier of people who believe, of sinners who believe in God and in his Son? How can he be just and the justifier? That's the problem. If God forgives, it seems as if he's trivializing with sin, as if he's condoning wickedness, whereas his own law says, Thou shalt not, here is the lawbreaker, and God says, I'll forgive you. The problem is resolved by the fact, however, that Jesus Christ became our representative and our substitute and actually died the very death that our sins deserved and drank the cup to the very dregs.

So that God has no claim against the sinner who believes in Jesus and trusts in him. And as Paul says, is found in him. Not having one's own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Now this must not be understood as if it meant that Jesus persuaded an unwilling God to forgive us. I want you to notice that. Paul says it was God who presented Christ as an atoning sacrifice.

God gave him. For God so loved the world that he gave his Son. Neither must we say that God gave his Son to the exclusion of the other fact that Jesus gave himself voluntarily and willingly.

No man takes my life from me, he says, I lay it down on myself. He was the author of his own life and he says, I have power to lay it down and when I've laid it down, I have power to take it up again. The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was unique and is capable of doing something that another person's death could not do because it has this propitiatory character.

Somehow when Christ has borne our sins in his own body to the tree, God has no case against us. Hallelujah. You know, it's as simple and yet as complex and as challenging as that.

But as comforting as that. My sins were settled on Calvary's tree. There is an old hymn.

I don't know that it would pass to get into our hymnary, but we used to sing it in the mission hall that I once attended. Yes, the old account was settled long ago. And the records clean today.

Jesus washed my sins away. Yes, the old account was settled long ago. Our Lord Jesus bore the penalty, the just penalty and the totality of it in his body on the tree so that God lays his thunders by, to quote from

one of our much loved hymns, and we have peace with him in the blood of his Son.

Thirdly, now I'm coming to the end. As being substitutionary, penal and propitiatory, the death of Jesus had the quality of a ransom price that affected the deliverance and the freedom of the penitent believer from his bondage to Satan, to sin, and to death. Jesus said, did he not to his disciples, the Son of Man came to save and to give his life a ransom for many.

The Greek phrase used there, a ransom for many, was often found in Greek papyri from New Testament times of the manumission of slaves, the price that used to be paid for the liberation of slaves. And slaves found their freedom by the payment of a ransom price. Jesus Christ died in order to set men free from eternal bondage to the consequences of their sin and rebellion against God.

We were eternally condemned, we were condemned already, says John. And there was no way out. It seemed this must be our doom forever and ever.

But Christ died. And because Christ died, if the Son shall make you free, he shall be free indeed. He brought good news to the meek and to the captives, to the slaves of sin and death, the slaves and the dupes of Satan, that a way has been opened for us to be liberated.

And more than that, being liberated from sin to be reconciled to God. How can I ask you to do something that I can't do? Oh, there is a third point, and you must do it yourself, you must go through it. Following its centrality, the centrality of the death of Christ, and its necessity as described in the New Testament, I would have liked to speak about its efficacy.

It accomplishes what it was meant to do. And if you read your New Testament you will find, or read the passage that Mr. Lowe read for us tonight, and you will notice these words, we are justified. A man who is justified finds that his sin problem has been resolved, sin has been forgiven, and he has a quality of righteousness imputed to him, that he can stand in the presence of God, and he is accepted in the Beloved One.

Clothed in his righteousness alone, and accepted. We are justified, we have peace with God, Romans 5.2, through our Lord Jesus Christ. The war has ceased.

The enmity is gone. Good relationships have been established. He is our Father.

He smiles upon us. We are His children. We cry, Abba, Father.

I go on again to verse 2. We have gained access into this grace wherein we stand. We are living in grace. What does that mean? God deals with us not as we deserve, but out of the abundance of His amazingly undeserved favor, He blesses us with every needed thing to know Him and serve Him in this life, to enjoy and serve Him beyond this life.

Go on. We rejoice in sufferings, until you come to verse 11. We have received the reconciliation.

We have received it. It is ours. We are right with God.

The word with which I must close is this. God has accomplished this in Jesus Christ. And you and I may enter into this inheritance which He offers us in the Gospel tonight by taking two decisive steps.

Repentance and faith. Repentance means a turning away from sin, a turning of our backs upon the thing in us or the things in us that are displeasing to God. A change of mind leading to a change of attitude and a change of life.

But then, synchronously with that, simultaneously with that, we must trust what God has given us and done for us in His Son and say, Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Not the labors of my hand can fulfill thy law's demand. Could my zeal know respite? No.

Could my tears forever flow? All for sin could not atone. Thou must save and Thou alone. Jesus, I will trust Thee.

Trust Thee with my soul. Guilty, lost and helpless, Thou canst make me whole. My dear people, is there anyone in this evening service who has not turned from sin in repentance to trust in Christ our Savior? I commend Him to you.

His death is the only death that has saving virtue that can reconcile you to God so that you know His peace. Become a member of the household of faith and of the family of God so that this life and the next is yours because it is His who earned it with His blood and He gives it freely to those who trust Him. Let us pray.

Lord, our God, we acknowledge that with our feeble minds and understandings we have been attempting to meditate upon this inexhaustible theme and we feel as if we have begun to climb a mountain and have scarcely left the shallows. O Lord, teach us Your Word and Your Law and from the vantage point of Scripture and by the light and enabling of the Holy Spirit help us to take it in what it meant for our Lord the Crucified to take away our sin. Speak peace to us and enable us to come to terms with the realities of our experience whatever they may be through Jesus Christ, our Lord to whom with Thee, O Father, and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory world without end.

Amen.

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