

# The Greatest Treasure - Part 1

by Paul Washer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding sin and the glory of God in order to appreciate the Gospel and be saved.*

**Duration:** 1:25:35

**Scripture:** Psalm 5:5, Psalm 7:11, Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:23-25, Romans 3:28

**Topics:** "Greatest Treasure"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preaching the true gospel of Jesus Christ. He criticizes the current state of the gospel, which has been reduced to a few simple steps and a prayer, neglecting the theological depth and significance of the message. The preacher highlights the need to explain the concept of sin and the glory of Christ's person and death, rather than just stating them. He also emphasizes that humanity's purpose is to glorify God and find peace in Him, and that neglecting this purpose leads to confusion and brokenness. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God's love for humanity is centered on His Son, and neglecting the Son will result in severe judgment.

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## Transcript

Preaching is a privilege. It is also a very sad thing. It is a burden.

It is an oracle. It is something that the preacher does knowing that he will never be a success in what he is doing. That he will always, always fail.

Because the theme of his message goes beyond the tongue of both men and angels. Not only can the preacher not communicate the glory of the subject, he cannot even comprehend it. Often times when I look in scripture, especially when I look at apocalyptic language, as we would find in the Old Testament prophets, such as Ezekiel, or we find in the apocalyptic language of the New Testament, such as the book of Revelation, we see so many metaphors, exaggerated words, and illustrations.

And it is almost as if the prophet is seeing something so beyond his ability to comprehend, and so beyond his ability to communicate, that it puts him on the very verge of madness. The person of God, and what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, goes so far beyond our comprehension. And if we could comprehend it fully, it would go beyond the power of our heart.

It would disintegrate us. And if we could communicate it clearly to unregenerate hearts, we would only be seen as madmen. You see, in the mind of God, His Son is everything.

Everything that God has ever done, He has done through His Son, and He has done for His Son. This is why the judgments of God on the final day will be so terrible. Men will be cast into hell for neglect of the Son.

It is a cliché. I think it's been turned into a song that God loves people more than anything. Well, it is true that God loves people, but we are not the center of God's universe.

We are not the thing which God most esteems. God esteems and loves His Son. Tonight, we are going to fail.

Even now, I'm on the verge of just being broken. Going to fail. To take the Gospel of Jesus Christ and explain it, to comprehend it, it's beyond us.

But it's this very thing that we must attempt to do, because it is only through the preaching of the Gospel that men might be saved. In our world today, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been reduced to almost nothing. Its theological content has been disregarded or misunderstood.

It's been shaken to its very core and reduced down to nothing more than four spiritual laws or five things God wants you to know with a prayer at the end. That is not the Gospel of the Scriptures. We tell people that they are sinners, but we do not explain what that means.

We tell them that Christ has died, but they know nothing of the glory of His person or the nature of His death. And instead of calling men to repentance and faith, we lead them to an evangelical creed and we get them to repeat a prayer, and if they've done so, we popishly declare them born again. The whole thing is a travesty.

So that I would submit to you today that it is not so much that men are so hardened to the Gospel, but it's that men are ignorant of the Gospel and men are ignorant of the Gospel because so many who are proclaiming the Gospel are also ignorant of it. We need an understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And we need the Scriptures and we need the Spirit of God to give us that understanding.

Now, we're going to go to a passage which I believe and I've preached so many times. I believe it is one of the greatest passages in all of Scripture. It's found in the book of Romans 3. It begins in verse 23.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed. For the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Some of the greatest preachers in the history of Christianity, two that I have in mind, Charles Spurgeon and Martin Lloyd-Jones, refer to this text as the Acropolis of the Christian faith. That high and fortified city of Christian doctrine. That the words contained here are of greatest importance.

And we truly cannot understand the Gospel if we do not grasp the significance of this text. So let's begin. First of all, verse 23, for all have sinned.

Immediately, I recognize that you do not understand the meaning of this. Neither do I. Because if you did, you would be trembling. You would be filled with fear.

You say, but Brother Paul, all have sinned, all have disobeyed. The word means to miss the mark, to fall short, as though a man were practicing archery and he was looking at a bullseye, and he draws back the bow and lets the arrow fly. Not only does it not hit the bullseye, it misses the target altogether.

That is sin. It is falling short of God's standard, falling short of God's law, falling short of the will of God that He has revealed through the Scriptures, but also revealed in the heart of all men, for He has written His law upon the heart of men. And all men have disobeyed the revelation that has been given to them.

All men. Now, as I clearly explain this to you, you are still not afraid. And here's the reason why.

It is one thing to sin against another man. It is a very dangerous thing to sin against the leader of a people. But it is a terrifying thing to sin against God.

The Puritans used to say it this way, when you sin, you have not sinned against some mayor of a tiny province or village, but you have sinned against the Lord of glory. You have trespassed and declared war upon the One who is altogether good and altogether deserving of all honor, worship, and obedience. You have done a terrifying thing.

I want you to think of this for a moment. In the days of creation, God lifts up His voice and He commands stars that could swallow up many times our sun. He commands those stars to put themselves in different places in His creation and they all bow down and worship Him.

He commands planets to fix their orbit and to stay their course until He gives them another word and they all cry out, Amen, so be it. He tells the mountains to be lifted up. He tells valleys to be cast down.

And they fall trembling before Him. He looks at the sea, the mighty sea. He looks at its great waves and He commands them, and you will come to this border and you will not trespass it.

And the sea bows down and worships. He lifts His finger in glory and seraphim and cherubim, angelic creatures, that their mere presence would disintegrate the universe. They fall down and worship.

And then He looks at you and says, Come, and you go, No! I will not! Now you can see why on the day of judgment, if you are without Christ, the last thing you will hear when you take your first step into hell is all of creation standing to its feet and applauding God, worshiping God, because He has rid the earth of you. Today, preachers, only if they do speak of sin, they speak of sin in general terms. They mix the preaching of the Word of God with psychology.

They tone down the blade. They want you to make you feel good about yourself. I do not want you to feel good about yourself.

I want you to be saved from what you are and what you have done. Sometimes people will say to me, Why do you speak so much about sin? It is because I want you to love God. You say, Well, how will speaking much about sin cause us to love God? Have you never read when Jesus, defending the woman, said this? She has washed my feet with her tears.

She loved much because she has been forgiven much. Many do not love God much because they do not realize how much He has forgiven them and they do not realize how much He has forgiven them because no one has told them the truth about their sin. All have.

I want you to know about sin because only in the light of sin can the Gospel appear to be glorious. Today, this afternoon, if you by chance looked up at the sky, you would have noticed something. There were no stars.

My question would be, where did they all go? Did some cosmic giant come by with a great big basket and throw them all in his basket and walk to the other side of the earth? The stars were there, but you could not see their glory and you could not see their glory because their glory is only revealed amidst the pitch black darkness of night. In the same way, men do not appreciate the cross of Christ because its glory is only truly revealed when we see the darkness of man, that it is an amazing thing if Christ had died for good men. It would have been an equally amazing thing if He had laid down His life for righteous men, but Christ died when we were sinners, when all of creation would have stood to its feet and demanded our condemnation, when every holy being in heaven would have nodded its head to our eternal death.

Christ died for the wicked. Our sin is dark, darker than any preacher can proclaim. The deeds we have done are coarse and evil and vile.

Now, this may seem unusual in light of modern day preaching, that I would spend so much time on this matter, but I can assure you that I am thoroughly biblical. We do not have a systematic theology in the Bible, but we do have the book of Romans, which I suppose would be the closest thing to a systematic theology. And isn't it interesting that in the 16 chapters of the book of Romans, the first three chapters are basically dedicated to the sin of man? And Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, using all his intellectual might to do one thing, to show men their sin and to bring all men under condemnation, to demonstrate that no man can rightly be saved, that all men deserve eternal condemnation and there is nothing man can do to save himself.

Isn't it interesting that Paul spends so much time on this theme before he begins to explain the salvation of God in Christ? Why is that? The preaching of sin is necessary that men might begin to see through their pride and the veil of their hypocrisy their own evil and their need of a merciful God. If I walked up to you today, any one of you, and I offered you a bologna sandwich, none of you would fall to the ground weeping and kiss my hands. None of you would be so appreciative that you would cry out to me countless thank yous, thank yous, thank yous.

Why? Because your bellies are full. But I can assure you I've served in many places in the third world where if you gave a man a bologna sandwich, he would do just the very thing I described. He would kiss your hands.

He would wipe your feet with tears. Out of need. So many people say they want to learn to appreciate the cross.

Christians say they want to grow in their love for Jesus Christ. I assure you, there's only one way for this to be done. First of all, you must recognize your need.

To come to Christ, you must recognize the greatness of your need and the vileness of your sin. To love Christ as a Christian, you must come into a greater and greater understanding of the very thing from which

He has saved you. Sin.

Prior to the flood, God says that every thought of a man's heart is evil. Although the flood washed away most men, it washed nothing from the heart of man. Because soon as the men began to spread across the earth, we see the same thing, that the heart of a man is evil.

You know, I've shared this many times, but a reporter came up to me one time after I read that verse in Genesis 6, and he says, I don't agree with your interpretation. And I said, sir, it wasn't my interpretation. I just read the text.

And he said, well, I still don't agree. I said to him something that I'm going to say to you now. If I could pull out your heart, if I could take every thought that you have ever thought, and I could put it on a DVD, and I could show it here tonight in front of everyone in this auditorium, you would run out of this building and you would not show your face here again because you have thought things so evil you would not share them with your closest friend.

And if your closest friend knew some of your thoughts you've thought about him or her, they would no longer be your closest friend. You see, sin is not some anomaly. It's not just some mistake.

It comes forth from the fact that man is a fallen creature and that man has become twisted and dislocated, and man needs a Savior. It is what we are. It's not simply what we do.

For this reason, in Isaiah, he says all our good works are like filthy rags before God. If I were to bring a leper in here tonight, I mean a leper with the worst sort of leprosy, you would smell him before you came into this auditorium. And when you saw him standing here on the platform, you would be amazed.

You would be nauseated. He is nothing but rotting flesh and pus and blood. But let's say that all of you good people want to get together, so you go out somewhere in Edmonton and you find the finest silk that can be found.

And you're going to make this man presentable, so you wrap him from head to toe in the finest, purest silk. And you stand back to look at your creation. He may appear beautiful, but only for a moment, because in time, the corruption of the man himself is going to bleed through the cloth, and the cloth is going to become as vile as the man.

That is why good works cannot save you. Because even our best works before God are unrighteous. Now, he says, all have sinned.

And then he goes on and he says, and fallen short, or fall short of the glory of God. Modern day interpretation of the Bible, which seems to center around man being the center of all things, would interpret this passage this way. God created you for a glorious purpose.

And you have fallen short of that glorious purpose. And God wants to save you so that He can restore His glorious purpose in you. That's true, but it's not the main idea.

The main idea is this. God created you for His glory. Not yours.

He created you for His purpose. You see, you were made for God to give yourself wholly and completely to Him. And when you do not do that, you become disfigured and dislocated and you become confused and you cannot find meaning or purpose or anything else.

You weren't created for some special purpose just given to you. You were created for Him. You can play a fine song on a guitar, but you can't shoot an arrow out of it.

You can shoot a heavy arrow out of a good bow, but you can't play music on it. By the very nature of things, different things are created for different purposes. And if you use them outside of their purposes, they are to no avail.

They do not function. You want to know why mankind does not function? You want to know why mankind is so messed up? You want to know why this entire globe is about to bust at its seams and fall apart, disintegrate itself, die in a whimper? It's because men are not living for the very reason they were created, which is the glory of God, the good pleasure of God, to serve the God Who made them and sustains them. But since we have turned away from that high calling, professing ourselves to be wise, we have become fools.

Men who give themselves to trinkets and hobbies and entertainment, to buying clothes to impress people they don't even like, to striving to gain the world knowing that in just a few short minutes they're going to die. To stand in front of mirrors as youth revel in their beauty, only to realize that in a few short years their beauty will be gone and their strength will be taken from them. We are pitiful because we are dislocated.

We are broken. We are misdirected. We are confused.

God has made us for Himself who will find no peace until we find peace. God has set eternity in the hearts of men. That is why a man... That is why you... Let's not talk about other men.

Let's talk about you. You see something that you like and you're assured that if you buy it or if you obtain it, it's going to give you peace. It's going to make you happy.

It's going to fulfill you. Maybe a relationship. Any kind of thing.

You go after it with all your might and no sooner do you have it than you feel incomplete and you want something else. Why? Eternity has been placed in your heart. Your heart has an infinite hole.

There's nothing in this world that is infinite. All of it is finite. All of it comes to an end sooner or later.

It does not go on and on and on. You can take this whole world, put it inside your heart, declare ownership of everything and you will still be empty because only God can fill the heart that He has made. Only God.

No one else. That is why men are called very frequently in the Scriptures, fools, because they seek after those things that cannot fill. They chase after things that are not eternal.

And they die with a handful of toys. Man's days are like grass. If the flower of the field, so he flourishes.

When the wind passes over him, he is no more. And the place therein acknowledges him no more. This is life.

Without, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But now, we go to verse 24. And Paul is going to speak of the Christian.

Now, I have to be very careful here because I think North America is Christian, right? Canada is Christian. The United States is Christian. And what I have to explain to you is neither is Christian.

The majority who call themselves Christian are not Christian. And if there is a minority in Canada and the United States of America, it is the true Christian community. Paul is not speaking to carnal men who go to church every once in a while and profess Christ and live just like the world.

Paul is speaking to Christians. People who have believed in Christ, that have been regenerated by the Spirit of God. People whose affections have been changed so that they desire God and desire righteousness.

This is what he says about Christians. After saying that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, he says this, Christians being justified. Now, what does it mean to be justified? Does it mean that the moment a person believes God, that God makes them into a perfectly righteous being who no longer sins, or that He infuses them with some great strength or grace or power and enables them to live a perfect life before Him? Absolutely not.

Justification is a forensic term or a legal term. What does it mean? It means the moment a person believes God. Remember what it says about Abraham? Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Abraham believed God and he was justified. When a person believes God, the Bible says they are justified. It means that God looks down from His throne and legally declares them to be right with Him.

And not only that, now listen, this is a very important point. When a person believes God, God looks down at that person and legally declares them to be right with Him and He treats them. That's a very important word.

He treats them as someone who is perfectly right with Him. Now, He says here, being justified. Here's something that you need to understand.

If I'm ever teaching in a university, which is very doubtful, but if I ever am and I'm teaching a class on comparative religions, the different religions of the world, I assure you, you should take my class because you can reduce all the religions of the world down to two religions. A religion of grace and a religion of works. There's something interesting about most religions in the world, almost all of them.

Do you realize that almost all the religions of the world recognize that there is a God, but they also recognize that they're not right with Him? Isn't that amazing? And all the religions of the world are trying to figure out the goal of that religion is how can I be right with God? That ought to tell us something. The conscience of all men is constantly screaming at them, telling them they are not right. They are not right.

They are not right. But now we have all these religions that are seeking to answer the question how can a man be right with God? You go to the Muslim. You say, sir, if you died right now, where would you go? He says, I'd go to paradise.

Why? Well, I've read the Koran. I love the Koran. I've made the pilgrimages.

I've given alms to the poor. I pray every day. I am a righteous man.

I have done what I need to do. I am a righteous man. And basically saying through his works, I have earned entrance into paradise.

Then you go to the Jewish man and you say, if you died right now, where would you go? He may say, I would go to heaven. Why would you go to heaven? I love the Torah. I love the law of God.

And I seek to obey the law of God. I am a righteous man. My deeds are true.

They are good. Again, almost as if I've earned it. I've earned entrance.

I've done good things. I could just carry on with other religions, but I'll stop there. Because the whole idea is I've done enough.

I've been good enough. But then you get to Christianity. Now, true Christianity.

Not the Western necessarily evangelicalism that we have today. True Christian. And you say, sir, if you died right now, where would you go? And he says, I would go to heaven.

And you say, well, why? And he begins to share with you something you did not expect. He says, in sin did my mother conceive me. And in sin was I born.

And like all the wicked, I went astray from the womb. Like all, I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is no command I have not violated either in thought or in deed.

And you say, well, sir, I don't understand. I mean, I understand these other men. They're going to heaven because they say God owes it to them.

They've earned it. They deserve it. They have worked for it.

And sir, you're telling me you're going to heaven even though you deserve the very opposite. How can that be? And the Christian says, it is because I am going to heaven based upon the virtue and the merit of another, Jesus Christ, my Lord. In this, you can see that the Christian is actually the only man who can claim heaven without boasting.

The Christian is the only man who can claim heaven while at the same time humiliating himself because he declares, I have no personal merit. I have no power of virtue. I have nothing to even crack the door or turn the handle to heaven.

If I am judged based upon my own deeds, surely I should be cast into hell. But God, in His mercy, sent His Son who lived the perfect life I could not live, and He died the perfect death I could not die. And I am going because He alone has paid my ransom.

That is the difference between Christianity and every other religion of the world. Now, some of you might say, Aha! Well, then that explains it. All these Christians running around saying they believe in Jesus and living like devils.

No, that does not explain it. Yes, we go to heaven only by faith and faith alone, not our own works, lest any man should boast. But here is what you should understand.

Those who believe have also been regenerated, made alive by the Spirit of God. God has taken out their heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh that will respond positively to divine stimuli. They have become new creatures in Christ.

Old things pass away. Behold, all things are new. Their very nature has been changed and therefore their affections are changed.

And because their affections are changed and made righteous, they now desire righteous things and they do not live like before. So any person coming to you saying they are thoroughly Christian and live like devils, they are devils. They are.

Jesus said, You will know them by their fruit. Peter said, Make your calling and election sure. Paul said, Examine yourself, test yourself to see if you are in the faith.

We are saved by faith. But those who believe have been regenerated by the Spirit of God and bring forth fruit of their repentance. But nevertheless, salvation is by, through faith, being justified.

Now look what it says here. Being justified as a gift by His grace. This is almost redundant.

Grace has the meaning of gift. So why is Paul iterating and reiterating? Why is he repeating himself here? It's almost as though he's saying we're declared right with God, not by our own virtue and merit, but by a gift, by a gift, by a gift, by a gift, by a gift. Why? Because this is one of the hardest things to pound into the heart and head of a man.

A man full of pride who will basically say this, If I cannot earn it on my own, then send me to hell. I'll take no gift. That's why it is only the humble who say I have no way.

I have nothing earned. I can gain nothing from God. Please give me that gift.

It's amazing here that the word gift is translated from a Greek word that's used in another place that gives us some idea of its meaning. In the book of John, we are told that they hated Him without a cause. That the people hated Christ even though He never gave them a cause to hate Him.

Christ never gave anyone a cause to turn against Him, to mistreat Him, and most certainly not to crucify Him. They hated Him though He did not give them a cause. That's the same word used here.

And what it means is God declared us to be right with Him even though we never gave Him a cause to do it. The only thing we ever gave God a cause to do is condemn us through our constant rebellion, our constant human centeredness, our neglect of God, and so many other crimes unspeakable that I do not have time to mention them though you give me 100,000 years. God has justified us even though we gave Him no cause.

The one who gave Him cause is Jesus Christ. So he says, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. Now, these two words I want you to fix yourself upon.

Redemption and propitiation. Possibly other than the names of God, the word propitiation is the most important word in the entire Bible. If you do not understand propitiation, you cannot understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But before we get to redemption and propitiation, I need to point something out to you. We have a theological and philosophical problem here. As a matter of fact, what we have presented before us in verses 23 and 24 is the greatest problem in the entire Bible.

It's what the Bible is all about. It is what Scripture is all about. And if you do not understand this point, again, you do not understand the Bible.

You do not understand the Gospel. We have before us in these two verses the greatest of all dilemmas. I refer to them as a divine dilemma.

An almost unsolvable or seemingly insolvable problem. You say, well, what's the problem? Here's the problem. If God is just, He cannot.

If God is good, He cannot forgive you. The greatest philosophical, theological problem in all the Bible is this. How can a just God forgive wicked men and still be just? Go with me.

Hold your place in Romans and go with me to Proverbs 17. Verse 15. Here we have a great illustration of this seemingly unsolvable problem.

Listen to what it says. He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord. Now, an abomination in the Scriptures, that's probably the hardest word in all the Scriptures.

To be an abomination is to be accursed. It is to be the most vile, twisted, horrid, putrid thing imaginable before God. And here's the problem.

He who justifies the wicked is an abomination before God. But Romans 3, look what it says. Verse 23.

For all have sinned. All are wicked. Verse 24.

But God justified them. You see the problem? In one part of Scripture it says he who justifies the wicked is an abomination before God. And then we get to the New Testament and God says He has justified the wicked.

You see, folks, here's what you need to understand. Sometimes when I'm speaking in a rather secular setting and I mention even the idea of eternal judgment or hell, people will tell me, well, I'm just appalled that you would even say something like that. That you would even suggest that God would send someone to hell.

Well, heaven has a similar problem. They're appalled also. But for another reason.

When all the holy, angelic beings in heaven see God cast a man in hell, it's of course, that's what should happen. The man is wicked. He is vile.

He has hurt himself. He has hurt others. He has neglected God.

He has hated God. He has fought against God. Put him out! The problem heaven has is when God takes a sinner and doesn't throw him in hell.

But He takes that sinner and declares him to be right. That's when the angels are going, we're appalled. I mean, is not God just? I mean, how can a just God do something like this? Can He just look over sin? Can the Holy One look upon evil? You know, it's very hard for us to understand this problem because we live in a culture that knows nothing of justice.

If a guy kills many, many people in a store or a restaurant, we explain it away. We say that, well, he needs counseling. We have no idea of justice.

We have no idea of right and wrong. We have become a people like Nineveh that does not know their right hand from their left hand. But the greatest problem, I assure you, in all of Scripture is this.

If God is a just God, and yes, He befriends and pardons the wicked, how can He be just? Let me give you a rather hard illustration that may help you. Let's say that we're dismissed tonight and you go to your home. And when you walk through the door, you find that your family has been slaughtered.

And you see the murderer standing over your family, squeezing the life out of your last sibling or child. And you run across the broken bodies and you grab the man and you throw him to the ground and you tie him up. You call the police and the police come and haul him away.

A few months later, he's presented before the judge. And the judge looks down on this man. And he says this, I am a gracious judge and compassionate and slow to anger and full of mercy.

Therefore, I pardon you and I cover your crimes. What would be your response? I can tell you what's your response. You would be calling the newspaper.

You would be writing petitions to the government. You would be on talk shows telling the entire world or trying to tell the whole world that there's a judge in Edmonton that is more vile than the criminals that he sets free. Because a judge should do justice and equity and fairness.

He cannot simply pass over crimes and let criminals run free. So you demand that in your society and you grant that privilege to judges, but you say God is wrong for exercising the same justice? He is the judge of all the earth. So the great question in all the Scripture and what the Gospel is all about is this, how can God, as Paul says in Romans 3, be just and at the same time, justifier of wicked men? How can He do that? How can He? The Scriptures tell us there's one way.

One way that has been ordained by God without further explanation. Christ, verse 24, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood. How can God justify the wicked? How can He justify the wicked? Because Christ through His blood has redeemed them.

Now, redemption is a word that refers to the paying of a price to set free a slave or a captive or a criminal. A price is paid to satisfy justice so that that criminal may be set free. Now, the payment, as you are aware, if you know anything about the New Testament, was the blood of God's own Son.

But now the question is, to whom was the payment made? Who demanded the payment? It's amazing. Many people still follow the ancient heresy that the payment was made to the devil as though the devil were the king of hell. That's Dante's idea, but it's not a biblical idea.

To whom was the ransom paid? Well, who was it holding you captive? Who was it that was against you and had sentenced you to die? Now, this may come as a shock to many of you, but I can assure you it is thoroughly orthodox Christianity. The payment was demanded by God and the payment was made to God. Sometimes people will tell me this.

They say, Brother Paul, God has saved me. And I'll ask them this question. From what? And they go, well, sin.

I said, sin wasn't coming after you. If God has saved you, He has saved you from Himself, from His justice. I like to put it this way.

God has saved you from Himself, He saved you for Himself, and He saved you by Himself. God is a just God. Your sin evokes the wrath and the anger of a good God.

Your sin brings condemnation voiced from the very throne of God. For you to be saved, someone had to satisfy God's justice, and only God could do it. God's Son became a man, took your place on the tree, and your sin was imputed to Him, and then all the justice of God that should fall upon your head fell upon the Son.

He paid for your crimes. Now, let's back up for a moment, and let's talk about the character of God. I have used some words that are probably very foreign to many of you.

The wrath of God. When was the last time you heard a sermon on the wrath of God? It's all over the Bible, but preachers just seem to conveniently avoid the topic. When was the last time you heard a sermon on the anger of God? Again, it's all over the Bible.

Now, when was the last time you heard a sermon on the hatred of God? Isn't it amazing? Evangelical Christians who claim to believe the Bible conveniently avoid many of the statements that the Bible makes about God, or they explain them away. If I mention the hatred of God, someone will say, but God loves the world. Yes, He does.

But the Bible also says His hatred is revealed against men. If you look at Psalms 5.5, it says in the NIV, God hates all those who do wrong. In other translations, God hates those who do iniquity.

God hates those who sin. You say, well, wait a minute, Brother Paul. The Bible says for God so loved the world and the world is full of sinners, and God loves sinners, doesn't He? Yes.

Well, John 3.16 is in the Bible, isn't it? Absolutely. Absolutely. But here's the problem.

Psalms 5.5 is too. And see, we conveniently seem to gravitate to one text and seem to conveniently gravitate away from another. Well, Brother Paul, how do you explain this? First of all, let me say this.

Many evangelists, the first thing they'll do when they get up in a pulpit is say this. Many of you think God is an angry God, and I'm here to tell you God is not an angry God. I'm here to tell you today that those evangelists lied to you.

Because the Bible says in Psalms 7, God is a God who is angry every day. Now, what are we going to do with these kinds of verses? Ignore them? You know it's dangerous to take away from God's Word. You know that, don't you? So what do we do with these texts? How do we explain them? First of all, let's talk about the anger of God.

Isn't it amazing? When I talk about the anger of God, people get mad. They get angry. So they reserve for themselves the right to be angry, but they don't allow God to get angry.

Isn't that amazing? If I tell you a story, or if I read a newspaper report about a little boy that has been kidnapped by a vile man and held prisoner in his basement for ten years and tortured, how do you feel about that? Are you neutral? Do you like say, oh, well, you know, that's just the way some people are. How do you feel? Do you feel angry? Well, God sees this stuff going on every day. Not only the Hitlers of the world, but your self-love that causes you to hurt another or put your interests above another.

Your self-love that causes you to neglect God. All these things, He sees them. He's righteous.

Do you realize Adam and Eve ate a piece of fruit and the entire universe was cast into condemnation? God is holy. He is righteous. He loves with a pure love all that is holy and righteous, but with an equal hatred, He hates everything that contradicts His righteousness.

He does. Let's talk about that for a moment. A lady said one time, she said, no, God cannot hate.

And I said, why? She said, well, God is love. Therefore, God can't hate. And I said, no, ma'am.

God is love. Therefore, He must hate. She said, I don't understand.

I said, let me explain it to you this way. Do you love Jewish people? She said, yes. I said, then you must hate the Holocaust.

I mean, if you tell me that you're pretty neutral about the Holocaust and it wasn't that big a deal, I'm going to think you're just as much a monster as Hitler is. Do you love babies? She said, well, of course. I said, then you must hate abortion that kills tens of thousands of babies.

I said, do you love African Americans? She said, well, yes. I said, then you must hate slavery. See, if you truly love that which is right, that which is righteous and honorable and true, you must have a righteous indignation against all those things that contradict those virtues.

And we do. I just read a story here in the Canadian newspaper of what? Of food being sent to starving children in Africa, but the militia people stole all the stuff. How do you feel about that? That little children are going to die so that rebels can sell the food that should have been given to them.

Are you neutral about that? If you are, you are a monster. You're not neutral. You get angry.

But God is a perfect being. Let me put it this way. You know what the most terrifying thing in all of Scripture is? The most terrifying thing ever told us about God? This is it.

He's good. And you say, well, what's so terrible about that? You're not. So what is a good God supposed to do with you? The mafia and gangsters, they're not afraid of a corrupt judge because that judge is just like them.

What they're terrified of is a just. It's sobering, isn't it? Because we're not asking what should God do with the likes of Hitler or Mussolini or the son of Sam. I'm asking you, what should God do with the likes of you? Because you've already admitted that you would do just about anything to keep people from seeing every thought.

You see, God is angry because He is righteous and He is good. God's wrath is a reality because He will sooner or later deal with the injustice of this planet and the injustice of your own doing. You say, well, Brother Paul, how does it work? You're telling me on one hand God hates the wicked.

On the other hand, God loves the wicked. What does all this mean? Let me explain it to you this way. The Bible teaches clearly that the wrath of God is marked out for the wicked.

His righteous indignation is against them. But the Bible also tells us that God is of such a nature that He can even love the objects of His wrath and work for their salvation. It is as though the wrath of God is building, being stored up, as Paul says in the book of Romans and in other places, and the prophets themselves say the same thing.

The wrath of God is being stored up and growing every day against the wicked. But God's mercy holds His wrath back. And with its other hand, mercy cries out for men to come.

Come! Come! Be saved while you can still be saved. But the Bible assures us that one day, mercy will withdraw her hand from this side and mercy will withdraw her hand from the other side and the wrath of God will fall upon men to such a degree that they will cry out for the rocks and the mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the face of the Lamb. And that is why both prophet and apostle and teacher and preacher are crying out, Save yourself from this wicked generation.

Turn to the Lord while there is still time. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day.

Now, I want us to look at a propitiation for a moment. The word is very associated with the Latin word for mercy. Even the old Spanish word propitio, propitio, meaning mercy.

And what is a propitiation? It is a sacrifice that satisfies the just demands of God. And in satisfying His justice against us, it appeases His wrath. Now, I suppose that many of you are familiar with the Chronicles of Narnia.

Maybe you read the books or you saw the movies, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader. Well, there is an interesting scene in the movie in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe that gets it wrong. Now, I like the movies, they're fine.

But it gets it wrong. Because here's what happens. Peter is standing on a hill and Aslan is beside him.

Aslan the lion, who represents Christ. And down in the valley there is Edmund, the traitor, Peter's brother, who betrayed them all and was held captive by the white witch and was destined to die. But Aslan sent a team of soldiers in to free Edmund.

And now Edmund was safe in camp. But the white witch came. And she said, you have no right to take him.

He is a traitor. Basically, he is a sinner. You cannot take him by force.

You cannot just call him back. So Peter is disturbed. Peter says, Aslan, you can do anything.

Why can't you just take my brother back and save him from the death that the white witch is going to thrust upon him? And this is what Aslan says in the movie. He says, Peter, you need to understand. There is a principle.

Basically, he says, a principle of justice that is over me. A deep magic that not even I, though I am the son of the emperor, not even I can go against that principle of justice. Here's the problem.

That's wrong. When I tell you that before God can pardon a man, He must satisfy justice. I am not saying there is some overarching principle of justice in the universe that God Himself has to submit to.

Not at all. When God says He must satisfy justice before He can pardon the sinner, He's talking about His own justice. He is just.

Sometimes I've heard evangelists say this. So wrong are they. Sometimes I've heard evangelists say this.

Instead of being just with you, God was loving. Have you ever heard that? Well, if you've studied logic, you realize that doesn't work. Because if it's true that instead of being just with you, God was loving, then it means God's love toward you is unjust.

That He has loved you unjustly. He has turned away from His own justice. He has denied who He is in order to love you.

And that, my friend, is sin. Men do that every day. In order to love you, in order to save you, God must satisfy His justice.

His own. You see, in His attributes, He is perfect. He cannot love at the expense of His justice and His holiness.

But there must be perfect unity in God. Who will not violate who He is. And that is the reason for the cross of Christ.

Because we have this question. How can God be just and yet justify wicked men? And there's only one way. On the cross, the Son of God died for those men and paid the price for their crimes and satisfied God's justice and made it possible for a just God to justify the wicked.

That, my friend, is the gospel. That is. Now, we talk much about the death of Christ.

But what does it mean? Have you ever asked yourself, how is it that the death of a person can pay for the sins of others? That's an important question. And how must that person die in order to pay that? Now, first of all, we know some things from Scripture, don't we? We know that the sacrifice, the one who dies, must be a man. As the old Puritans used to say, He must be of our stock.

He must be of our flesh. He must be one of us. He must be a man.

We know from the book of Hebrews that the blood of bulls and goats will not take away the sins of men. It will not cleanse their conscience. It takes something more.

It was Adam who sinned. It is the son of Adam who must repair the breach. But also, this one who dies on the cross must be more than a man.

You see, God alone is Savior. It's His prerogative. And God does not share the title of Savior with anyone.

That's the reason why the doctrine of the Jehovah Witnesses is such an abomination. Because what they basically say is that God made a creature and sent that creature down to die. Thus, a creature becomes our Savior.

Absolutely not. God alone is Savior and He shares His glory with no one. The one who died on that tree not only had to be man, but had to be God.

God in the flesh. Another thing that's important to understand is the question the Puritans used to make. Who but God could withstand the wrath of God? The wrath of God melts mountains like wax.

It disintegrates planets. It runs rivers dry. Who alone but God could withstand such wrath? One time, a young man stood up while I was preaching.

He said, I have a question for you. How can one man suffering for a few short hours on a cross save a multitude of men from an eternity in hell? It doesn't seem right. And I said, oh, young man, thank you for that question.

That one man could suffer for a few short hours and save a multitude of men from an eternity of suffering because that one man was worth more than all of them put together. The infinite worth of Christ. The sacrifice had to be more than a good man.

The sacrifice had to be more than a perfect man. The sacrifice had to be more than an archangel. The sacrifice had to be of infinite value to pay for the sins of God's people.

And so there He is hanging on that tree. God and man. A man who was born under the law and yet like us in every way and yet without sin.

And at the appointed time, He went to that tree. He was nailed to a cross. And He was nailed there to die for our redemption as a propitiation.

Now, here's something I want to throw before you. Listen very carefully and tell me what you think. This comes from a book I read one time years ago, I think in the country of Romania.

I was in a Germanic seminary teaching. I was very, very tired. And I went into their library and looked for something to read.

I pulled this book off the shelf and this is what it said. A summary. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, God the Father looked down from heaven and He saw the punishment and the suffering that was heaped upon Jesus His Son by the hands of the Romans and He counted that suffering as payment for our sin.

Now think about that. What do you think? Do you know that's heretical? Can you spot the error? It's large. What I just told you is heresy.

Think about it. Do you have enough discernment with regard to the Gospel to recognize the heresy? Here is the heresy. If you are saved here today, it is not merely or primarily because of what the Romans did to Jesus on the cross.

If you are saved here today, it's because of what God the Father did to Jesus on the cross. He forsook Him and He crushed Him under the full force of His wrath. Have you not read in Isaiah 53? Verse 10, And it pleased the Lord.

It pleased Yahweh to crush Him, the Messiah. It doesn't mean that Jehovah got some glee out of crushing His own Son. It means this.

The will of God was accomplished by the Son, suffering the wrath of Almighty God because in suffering the full force of God's holy hatred against our sin, He satisfied justice when He cried out, It is finished. Our crimes were paid. See, so many people do not understand the cross of Calvary.

Let's just look for a moment. Jesus is on the cross. And what does He cry out? He cries out, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? I've heard preachers say that the Father looked down from Heaven and saw the suffering of His Son and turned away because He could not bear it.

That's absolutely preposterous. God lacked the moral fortitude to deal with Calvary? That's not what Jesus says. He doesn't say, My God, My God, why have You turned away from Me because I'm suffering so much You can't bear it.

He says, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why have You abandoned Me? That's what He says. Now, hold your place in Romans and go to Psalms 22. Look at verse 1. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Far from deliverance are the words of My groaning.

O My God, I cry by day, but You do not answer, and by night, but I have no rest, yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted. They trusted and You delivered them.

To You they cried out and were delivered. In You they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach of men and despised by the people.

What is Christ saying? When He cries out this Psalm 20, He's directing us to Psalm 22. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? And then He goes on and He gives this complaint in verse 2. O My God, I cry by day, but You do not answer, and by night, and I have no rest. Then in verse 4, He puts forth an argument.

In You our fathers trusted. They trusted and You delivered them. To You they cried out and were delivered.

In You they trusted and were not disappointed. He's saying there never was a time in the history of Your covenant people, Israel, that a man cried out to You sincerely and You did not deliver him. But here I hang on a cross and You have utterly forsaken and abandoned Me.

You have closed the doors of heaven and You will not hear My voice. Why? And then He answers. Verse 3, You are holy.

And in verse 6, I am a worm. On that tree, the sins of God's people were imputed to Him. They were laid upon Him.

As I have said before, you have the sinner unrepentant. Know this, that the wrath of God against Him is infinite. That if He dies in that state, He will suffer eternal punishment in hell.

The wrath of God will be His food by day and His food by night and His pillow when He attempts to sleep. The anger of God will be against that man throughout all of eternity. But in order to save you, the Son of God went to that tree and your sin was cast upon Him.

And the anger, the just anger and the holy hatred of God against evil fell upon His Son and crushed Him. It fell upon His Son. Do you see how little we understand of the cross? Modern day preaching? Most people think that somehow the Romans beat up Jesus and because of that, our sins were paid for.

Well, it was necessary that He die on a tree and it was necessary that it be a bloody death, a bloody sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. But understand this, it was not a

Roman cross that caused Christ to cry out in the garden, take this cup from Me.

The cup was filled with the wrath of Almighty God against you for all your iniquity, all your trespasses. Behold the love of God that He would give His Son. Now let's go back to Romans 3. And here we will finish.

Notice that Paul says in verse 25, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. Now look at this. Why did God placard His Son or publicly display His Son on a cross in the very center of the religious universe? It was to demonstrate something.

His Son was crucified not only to atone for our sins, but to demonstrate something, to reveal something. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, to demonstrate God's righteousness, to prove God's righteousness. And you ask yourself, why did God have to prove that He was really righteous? I mean, who would ever question that? Well, look at what the Bible says.

This was to demonstrate His righteousness because in the forbearance of God, He passed over the sins previously committed. What does that mean? Ever since the fall of Adam, there have been accusations of injustice with regard to God. Now imagine this for a moment.

I'm going to be sort of dramatic, I guess. We know so little about Satan and so little about his fall. We know a lot less than what we think we know.

But we do know there is a devil. We do know he is called Satan. He is the accuser of the brethren.

He is the accuser of God. He causes us to accuse one another. We also have an idea that he fell from heaven because of his great sin.

Now notice this. Now, people, listen to me. The angels fell, far superior to you and me, of far greater worth and glory than you and me.

The angels fell and they received perfect justice with no hope of a Savior. God did not use mercy toward them and He did not send them a Savior. Know this.

He did not have to send you one either. If He had let the whole world die and perish in hell, He would have still been God. We set ourselves up to be so important and so great and of such tremendous worth.

Know this, that creatures so glorious that if our eyes could behold them, we would think that they were beyond comprehension in worth. When they fell, God sent them no Savior. He practiced perfect justice.

Now imagine Adam's sins. And not only does God not kill him in the garden at that moment, but God, in Genesis 3.15, we have what we call the Protoevangelicum. We have the first promise of the Gospel where God says, in spite of this curse, in spite of this fall, I am going to send someone born of woman who will crush the head of the serpent and restore man to God.

Can you imagine on that day Satan goes, what? We fell. Okay. And perfect justice.

He should die. What, are you going to pass over his sin? Where's the justice of God? Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Can you do this? And then there's Noah. Satan points at Noah.

Yes, you destroyed the whole world under a flood, but Noah should have died too. Like all the rest, he and his family were sinners. How do you come off sparing them? Oh, and Abraham? Your friend? He didn't believe you.

He put his wife in jeopardy. I accuse him also, and I accuse you through him. He should die.

I commit a trespass? Perfect justice. Yes. Where's your justice with these? Oh, and Israel? Your people? They're nothing more than a nation of idolaters.

And David? Your son? A man after your own heart? He's a murderer. He killed Uriah. And Bathsheba? And the child that died? And the census that brought the death of thousands in Israel? Where do you come off pardoning them? Where is your justice? And the railings went on and went on and went on until 2,000 years ago God answered.

And it was basically this. Satan, come to the front. Do you want to know how I can give a promise of hope to a fallen man and woman? Do you want to know how I can spare Noah? Do you want to know how I can call Abraham my friend? Do you want to know how I can call David my son? Look to the tree.

My son is now dying for them all. You see, the only way that the Old Testament can be explained and the justice of God upheld is that He could pass over these sins committed because in His foreknowledge, His sovereignty, His election, He had ordained before the foundation of the world that His Son would die for them all. And that is why when the believer today is accused by the devil and the devil points his finger saying, this one too should die, God says, this one was born in Zion and his sins were atoned for by My Son.

If you do not understand the justice of God, you cannot understand the Gospel. Now, I ask you to think about this. Is it not true that many of you have heard things here as the daily meal? Do you see why the Gospel seems to have so little power? It's reduced it down to four spiritual laws and five things God wants you to know.

We've made man the center of all things. Unless they understand who God is, they cannot understand the why of the Gospel. God is good and God is just, and He cannot merely turn His back on us, save us by sweeping our sin under a rug.

He cannot ignore the reality of what we are. He cannot deny Himself. So in order to satisfy His justice, His Son dies on a tree.

When He cries out, it is finished. It's a commercial term meaning paid in. The crimes have been paid for.

Justice has been satisfied. Put away wrath. It has been quenched.

Now, those who believe in the Son may have ought so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal, everlasting life. You say, Brother Paul, is it for me? Is it for me? Is it for me? Maybe. Do you want to be saved? Do you want to be free from sin? Do you want to know God? Do you desire Christ? Has He become precious to you? Then the good news is, all of this is for you.

Those who come to Him, He will not cast out. Seek Him and you will find Him. Or better yet, He will find you.

That is my invitation. Because as I said last night, I will not manipulate your emotions. I will not dampen the lights.

There will not be music to work on your emotions. You have heard the Gospel and God declares that all men everywhere, you included, must repent of your sins, acknowledge that you cannot save yourself, and run to Christ, throw yourself on Christ, believe in Christ, forsake all other hopes, forsake all self-righteousness, and throw yourself on Christ. And I'm going to pray.

Someone, I suppose, is going to dismiss this meeting. And here's what I will tell you. I'm going to go back here, right behind this stage.

Now please, if you just want to come to talk to me about theology or something, please. You are troubled in your soul. You desire to be reconciled.

And you say, I need to know. I don't know if I'm Christian. Then I'll stay with you all night if necessary.

I will show you from Scripture. And other counselors will show you from Scripture. No church in this building.

You need no system. You need a person. And it is Jesus Christ.

And I implore you to come to Him.

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