

# Christ's Death as Preached by the Early Church

by Rolfe Barnard

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*The cross of Christ reveals God's love and redemption for sinners, making forgiveness possible through his sacrifice.*

**Duration:** 28:14

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Acts 7:53, Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Ephesians 2:8-9

**Topics:** "Early Church"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the significance of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. He acknowledges that it was man who physically killed Jesus, mocking and despising him. However, he also highlights that it was God's divine purpose to sacrifice his son as a substitute for our sins. The preacher references Luke 9:22, where Jesus himself states that he must suffer and be slain. He concludes by emphasizing that the cross was not a defeat for God, but rather a victory and a means of reconciling sinners to himself.

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## Transcript

2 Corinthians, at chapter 5, and I want to speak to you today from verses 18 and 19, that is, these verses will start us off, of the 5th chapter of 2 Corinthians, and I have a subject, and I'm very anxious for you to hear it. The subject for the message this morning is Christ's death, as it was preached by the early Church. Christ's death, as it was proclaimed and expounded and explained by the early Church.

In verses 18 and 19 of 2 Corinthians 5, we find our text, And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit, now here is our ministry. That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

I like Moffat's translation of the first phrase of that 18th verse. It reads as follows, It is all the doing of God, who hath reconciled me to himself through Christ. It is all the doing of God.

God did it all. And what he did was to reconcile me to himself through Christ, says the Apostle Paul. The subject of reconciliation, being reconciled to God, being restored to favor, is connected with peace.

A man who has peace, apart from being reconciled to God, has a false peace. But a man who has peace because he believes that he is back in the favor of a holy God, why, he has true peace. If any man has peace and the sense of restoration to the favor of God, Paul is saying here, it is because of God moving.

This, according to Paul, is the glory of the gospel. And then the command, be ye reconciled to God, is the challenge of the gospel. To the Apostle Paul, grace, and by grace we mean, or the scriptures mean, that it is the divine initiative that is fundamental.

According to Paul in the early preachers, everything, everything in religion that matters starts from God's side. Even faith and repentance and prayer, the three attitudes of the soul, which upon first glance might appear to originate in man, and the behuman virtues, even these three, faith, repentance, and prayer, if we believe what Paul says, are nothing of the kind. Instead of originating in man, faith originates in God.

Instead of originating in man, repentance originates in God. Instead of prayer originating in man, prayer originates in God. They are God's creation.

They are God's gift. Faith is God's gift, listen to it, because faith is brought forth or evoked by the action of God in revealing himself in Christ as worthy of all trust. Repentance is the gift of God because repentance is produced by that divine reaction to sin of which the cross is the culmination.

And when we see what lengths God went to to punish sin, in our hearts repentance would work. And prayer originates in God because we know not what we should pray for as we ought. But, thank God, the Bible says the spirit itself maketh intercession for us.

If we listened to the Apostle Paul and the early preachers, we'd understand that the passion and the hunger for God that some of us have experienced, that that passion and hunger came from God. And that God who gave us that passion and hunger answers it with the Lord Jesus Christ. We need in these days desperately to believe that man's intelligence and man's will and man's heart and man's conscience never initiate anything in religion.

And over the best moral and spiritual triumphs of this life, the child of God can only cry in the language of Psalms 115 and 1, Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory. Ladies and gentlemen, no man who is too proud to be infinitely in debt will ever become a Christian. For it is true that God gives forever and forever man receives.

And only when God's grace is recognized to be incomprehensible is it grace. And only when we cease striving and just receive the gift that's Christ, which we could never win by our striving, only then are we saved. Reconciliation, being reconciled to God, and peace go together.

And peace and reconciliation, the peace I have because I believe I'm reconciled to God, is connected and made possible by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2 and verse 16, let me quote it, And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And in Colossians 1 and 20, we quote, And having made peace through the blood of his cross by him, to reconcile all things unto himself.

So we see that Christ's death and our peace and our reconciliation are connected. Now, it's not the death of Christ apart from his resurrection, for the Bible doesn't talk in language like that. Vital union with Christ is only possible if Christ who died is alive.

And everything depends on a man's vital union with a living Christ. We must not try to analyze the cross of Christ. But, oh God, help us to be amazed by it.

No man can tell you all that the cross of Christ means. But, thank God, you can experience its power and the cleansing by the blood of him who hung on that cross. So when we talk about the preaching of the early church about the death of Christ, we do not mean that they divorced his resurrection from his death.

They preached the Christ who died and was raised again. The Apostle Paul, for instance, said he preached exactly what was preached from the very beginning. He said, I delivered unto you the gospel which I also received.

How that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures so forth. He preached that Christ died for our sins. But especially when we look into the book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit, called in our Bible the Acts of the Apostles.

But it's largely the Acts of God, the Holy Spirit, working through the Apostles. And when we look at the preaching that we find incorporated in the pages of the book of the Acts, we are right there looking at what the people nearest Christ in the days of his flesh preached. And I wanted this morning to see with you and to look with you at three various signal notes that were struck in the preaching of the death of Christ by his earliest followers.

And the first great note that was struck by the early church preachers that we need to talk about today was simply this, the cross of Christ was man's most flagrant crime. They preached that as they looked at the cross of Christ and saw the blood running down from the brow and the feet and the thigh and the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they were looking at sin's crowning horror. The cross and what men did to Christ as they kneeled unto that cross, according to the early preachers, originated in the very slums of the human heart.

For instance, one of the early church preachers, the Apostle Peter, preaching in the book to the people as recorded in Acts 3, verse 14, used this terrible language, it's very plain. But he said, He denied the Holy One and the just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you. Mind that in the picture of the human heart.

That's a picture of the very slums of the human heart. They had a choice and they made it. And they made a two-fold choice.

They denied the Holy One and the just. And they desired a murderer by the name of Barabbas to be granted unto them. And that took place, you remember.

Pilate said, Whom will you that I release? Jesus, which is called the Christ of Barabbas. And they said, Deliver unto us Barabbas and crucify him. Oh, the inner recesses of the human heart, your heart and mine, are discovered when we look at the cross.

And then in Acts 7, verse 53, Stephen preached some plain preaching. He talked about sin coming from the very slums of the human heart. Let me quote that 53rd verse.

Stephen says, Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? Just name one. They couldn't do it. And they slain them which showed before the coming of the just one.

And told about the coming of the Lord Jesus. They killed him. Of whom, this just one, of whom ye have been now, the betrayers and murderers.

Isn't that a catalog? Isn't that a coat of arms? Your great-granddaddies persecuted all the prophets. There was one of them that prophesied of the coming of the just one. They killed him.

And then when the just one came, Stephen said, You betrayed him and you murdered him. Thus, my friends, when we listen to the early church preachers, as they point the cross out, we see that at the cross sin stood condemned once for all. And there, if you will not turn aside, you remember that it is your hands that inflicted his wounds.

That is your sin and my sin. That is your sin, my guilt, and your guilt. This truth dawns on the soul of all who are moving towards salvation.

So the early church preached that at the cross we see sin's crowning horror, the very slums of the awful hearts, wicked as they are, of sinful men. Then there was a second note sounded by the preachers of the early church. And dead certainly they knew the gospel better than us.

They were near its source. And when they preached in the book of Acts, as their messages are recorded, we see not only in the death of Christ sin's crowning horror. That shows you what men will do left alone of God.

But in the second place, glory, hallelujah, according to the early church in the cross, the hand of God was seen. We've already seen the hand of men. They took him in with wicked hands, killed him.

But God was there, too. Let me quote Acts 2, verse 23. You ought to memorize this.

It's one of the most cryptic statements in the entire word of God. Listen to it. The Apostle Peter, preaching, says him, that's the Lord Jesus Christ, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

That is your sovereign purpose of God. That is the awful responsibility and wickedness of men. Christ hung on a cross for two reasons.

First, God put him there. Second, men put him there. Christ hung on a cross, poured out his precious blood, gave his soul unto death, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

And yet he hung on a cross because men took him. And out of the malice of their hearts, showing forth in that expression with wicked hands, they took him and crucified him and slew him. You say, Brother Barnard, explain that.

I can't explain it, but thank God I don't have to. I know that men killed Christ, but I also know that God hung him there as his sacrifice and as my substitute. And although I can't explain it, thank God I can believe it.

Praise the Lord. We need to sound that note today behind the apparent tragedy of the Lord of Glory hanging on a cross. The Bible says there was a divine purpose at work.

The Bible says that the cross was not God's defeat, but is God's purpose and God's victory. Man did his due. They took him with wicked hands.

They spat in his face. They pressed a crown of thorns and mockery upon his brow. They put a purple robe on him.

They perforated the atmosphere with their lawless cries. He saved others himself. He cannot save it.

Thou be the Christ, come down and save thyself and all of that. They shot dice for his garments that pierced his body. Oh, how they mocked him and despised him.

And they showed their hatred of the Holy One and the Just One. Yes, man did his due and showed what man will do any time God will let himself fall into their hands. But that isn't all that took place on the cross.

Thank God, man did his due, but God did his due. And he gave his son. He gave his son.

He placed his son there as his sacrifice and my substitute. Hallelujah. And my Lord Jesus Christ didn't go to death driven like a slave, but he went marching in the freedom of his own unconquered soul.

According to Luke 9.22, necessity had been laid upon him. For he said in that verse of scripture, The Son of Man must suffer and be slain. But thank God, it was a necessity not of mortal tyranny and violence, but it was the necessity of God's own love for the souls of men.

And so glory, hallelujah, as I stand before this microphone. Hallelujah. When we talk about the death of Christ, we mean more than what men did with their wicked hearts and hands.

But we point you to God acting there. It was God who was in Christ hanging on that cross. Thank God.

And he is doing it to reconcile the world to himself. Thank God in the death of Christ, at the cross of Christ, God is at work. And then there's a third note that was sounded by the early church preachers.

And that note is this, that the death of Christ was connected intimately with the forgiveness of my sins and I hope of yours. Here I'm on holy ground. Here is mystery.

How could he die in such a way that God could forgive my sins? You understand that preacher? No, sir. But thank God the scripture teaches it, line upon line, precept upon precept. And thank God I've believed it and I've experienced that wonderful rest and peace that a person has who's felt the burden and the load of his sin roll away.

Praise the Lord. If I stand before this microphone now forgiven in the sight of a holy God, it's not because God just overlooked my sins, not because he just forgot them. But thank God it's because he laid them on his Son, his sacrifice.

And that Son is my substitute, hanging there in my stead, taking the lash of God's anger against sin in my stead. Praise the Lord. Let me read you just two scriptures from the book of Acts.

I said the early Church preachers in the book of Acts talked about how the death of Christ and the forgiveness of my sins was connected. The forgiveness of my sins goes out of the death of Christ in Acts 5.31. Let me read this tremendous scripture. Him, that's the Lord Jesus, hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior.

What for? For to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin. Glory, hallelujah. Him hath God exalted, I'm going to read it again, with his right hand, God did it, to be a Prince or a Sovereign and a Savior.

What for? For to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin. Then in Acts 10.43 the same preacher says, To him, that's the Lord, give all the prophets witness that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sin. Isn't that wonderful? How? I don't know.

But thank God it's so. Thank God Christ died for the ungodly. Thank God Christ gave himself for our sins.

Thank God Christ made our doom his doom and gave his life for our redemption. Oh, my soul, what a tragedy to go to hell having lived in a world that was visited by God himself in Christ and he came down here in Christ for the express purpose of dying and being raised from the dead so that he might grant repentance to sinful men and forgiveness of their sins. In Psalms 130.4 I read this word.

If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity who shall be able to stand? Well, bless God, nobody. But God does mark iniquity. H.G. Wells, the historian, said to this boy they told him of a God who watched him and knew everything he did and marked it down.

He learned to hate that God. But praise God, I haven't finished the verse. The verse is if thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity who should be able to stand? The answer is nobody.

But the verse continues. But there is forgiveness with the Lord that thou mayest be feared. Thank God.

Oh, thank God. The death of Christ. It turns out that God, because he laid my sins upon Christ, glory, hallelujah, can say, Ralph, you go free.

Thy sins are forgiven. They go and sin no more. Our Father, help us as in a moment or two we'll go off the air just to rejoice in our Savior and our justification to let the blood of Christ pour into our souls and over our tired hearts one more time rejoice that in his death God was reconciling poor old sinners to himself.

He did it by putting our sins on Christ so that we might go free. Our salvation is of the Lord. It is God that did it.

We have a sense of being restored to thy favor because Christ died. We have peace that God gives because we've been justified by looking to him. Oh, thank you, thank you.

Speak to hearts and radio land, men and women in the church and out who do not know the forgiveness of sin. Oh, God, deal with them. Do not let them go to hell unwarned and unmoved.

And help us to pray for a mighty outpouring of the Spirit of God that the old story of Christ dying for sinners might not be a commonplace but might be used at God to break hearts and bend wills and bring sinners to himself. In Jesus' name we pray and for his sake, amen. For more information, visit [www.fema.org](http://www.fema.org)

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