

Life taken from the Life Giver

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[0:00] To Solomon and his temple to worship. And people, we read it in Psalm 122, they would come the length and breadth of Israel to come to Jerusalem to worship.

! The place of worship, and they're saying that'll get taken away, it'll be knocked down. And our nation will be scattered, vaporized, whatever.

The nation, they're thinking about the people of God. The community of God's people. Not only will there be no worship possible, there won't be a people of God.

God won't have a people, our place and our nation. And, do you know, I think that's a right concern, isn't it? A concern for God to be worshipped, and a concern for the community of God.

I mean, we sang about that at the beginning, didn't we? It's how blessed and pleased was I to hear the people cry, come let us seek our God today. We come together, and we're concerned that God should be worshipped, and that his people should be blessed.

[1:10] So, I think that's a good concern. I hope you have that concern. I hope you are concerned that God should be honored. And when we pray, may the name of the Heavenly Father be hallowed, I hope you're thinking, yeah, I want that.

I want God to be worshipped. I don't want him to be used as a swear word and disrespected. I want God to be honored. And I'm concerned about his people. And I pray for them and think about them. And some of them I know very well locally, but some of them I know across the world. And I think about them too. I'm concerned for the people. And so, I just think, I'm not going to fault them on that bit.

However, the way they went about it was completely wrong. It was the complete opposite of the way to bless and safeguard and progress worshipping the people of God.

Because Jesus came to bring those things. Getting rid of Jesus didn't help. And they thought the threat that needed to be dealt with was the Roman occupation.

[2:20] Political threat. I don't think they should have been worried about that so much as what the real problem for every human being is. Which is God's judgment.

Our sin and God's response to our sin. Which is we're not close to him by nature. We're not right with him by nature.

By nature he doesn't smile on us. By nature we're children of wrath. That's the real threat that we need to look out for. Not the Romans coming. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?

Would you be prepared to go before God's judgment on the last day? Just without Jesus? And say, I haven't done too bad. I've been okay.

Not as bad as other people. Tried my best. Would you be prepared to do that? I don't think that's a wise thing at all. Because if you know yourself, you know that your best is riddled through with selfishness, with impurity, with all sorts of unworthiness and failure.

[3:36] That's the thing you want to avoid. If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?

And our problem is not that we're sort of unhappy people or uncomfortable people or even that we're ill people. Our real problem is that we need our sins forgiven. God's future verdict.

What will you say on the last day? Well, anyway, they were worried about the Romans. And so there's two reasons why he said it, that Jesus was so successful.

And they were worried of under threat and loss. So second thing, what did he say? Well, I'm going to answer this in a rather convoluted sentence.

A profitable calculation of substitution. A profitable calculation of substitution. Let's look at his exact words.

[4:34] Verse 49. One of them named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up. You know nothing at all. That's not a very collegiate way of addressing his colleagues, is it?

You idiots. You just don't get it at all, do you? You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.

So, just taking that apart a little bit. You do not realize. It's the word for calculating. It's the word for reckoning. You haven't sort of thought it through and reckoned it all up and calculated how this works.

That word realize. And then the word better is a word that means to profit. To gain something. You know, there's something here to be gained.

And then he talks about substitution. One man die for the people rather than the whole nation perish. You know, just the use of the word perishing there. That's the thing he's afraid of than perishing.

[5:43] But perishing because of the Romans rather than perishing because of God's judgment. So, profitable. So, he's saying, here's something, you stupid listeners.

This is what he's saying, isn't it? You know nothing at all. Let me enlighten you. I'm not sure whether he was a very tactful man, was he? But this will do you good.

There's a profit here. It is better for you. It is profitable. There's something here to do you good.

There's something here, says Caiaphas, that you should be really glad about.

You think, wow, I've come out of this very well. Something to be glad about and grateful for.

Something from which there is benefit.

Now, he got it. That bit is correct. There is benefit. He didn't really understand how it worked. But Christian people sitting and listening, you know how it works.

[6:46] And we're going to go on through that. But you would agree, would you not? There was something enormously profitable for us in what happened when Jesus died. There was something that was certainly better.

Or if you go back more to the original, certainly beneficial. And we can sit here this morning actually saying, you know, there's something I should be really grateful for.

Something that Jesus did that's put me in a very enviable place. How pleased and blessed was I?

And perhaps one of the things that Christians need reminding of is how blessed they are.

You know, are you blessed? Oh, I don't know. I've got a headache. You know, my knee's funny or whatever it is like that. But actually, though we're conscious of things like that. I've got a cold.

Actually, Christian person, you are blessed. Because Jesus did something that was far, far better. It is better. An enviable position.

[7:49] So, a profitable calculation of substitution. So, this idea of calculating. He says, you don't realize. So, there's something to be realized.

There's something to be understood. Something to be, as I put it, to be calculated. And when Jesus died, there is a way of looking at that and sort of calculating and reckoning.

I get what happened there. Let me give you an illustration, which I heard a long time ago. So, as boyfriend and girlfriend, walking down the pier at Brighton Pier, the boy says to the girl, I love you so much.

Bounds over the railings, jumps into the sea, and the lifeboat has to come and collect him. And the girl thinks, what a stupid idiot.

How does that show he loves me? Pfft. Makes no sense, does it? Whichever way you reckon it, it makes no sense at all. Just foolishness.

[9:01] But, if part of the story was that she had just fallen into the water, and he jumped over to save her, that would make a lot more sense, wouldn't it?

And he could really say, I do love you, because even though I'm not a very good swimmer, I'm prepared to risk my life to save you. And she would go away from that, rather than think, what an idiot, thinking, he really does love me.

He was willing to risk his life to save me. And there's a calculation or a reckoning that you can do to understand and make something of it, and get an insight, and come away thinking, wow, that was great.

So, the death of Jesus makes sense. It's not a sort of an impenetrable mystery. Something we can understand. There's all sorts of ways that people have, through the centuries, tried to make sense of Jesus.

Death, they say it's an act of power, which it certainly is. That would come in another text. Some people say it's just a setting, an example. And you think, in what way does it, you know...

[10:14] Well, in a way it sets an example, but if that's all there was to it, it doesn't really make sense. But if he died to save us, because we were like the girl in the water about to drown, and he died to get us out of that position, that does make sense, doesn't it?

He died in the place of sinners. I should have died. He took my place. That makes sense.

There's a calculation there. And it's a calculation of substitution. One man dies for the people rather than that the whole nation perish.

It's a sort of exchange or a substitution. There's a death that's going to happen. We won't let that threat touch the whole nation and they perish, but one man will die instead.

I was trying to think about how to dwell on this matter of substitution. Do you order things on the internet from Sainsbury's or Waitrose?

[11:30] And sometimes they... Not that we do this, but I think this is what happens, isn't it? Correct me if I'm wrong. You asked for a tin of carrots and they say, we're out of carrots, would you like a tin of peas instead?

And they substitute and you get a list, don't you, of the things they've substituted. We gave you carrots and blah, blah, blah, blah. Like that. That's a substitution, but the footballer one is a substitution.

But they don't do the whole job, do they? They're not complete illustrations because one tin of peas, one tin of carrots, they're more or less equal. Depending on what you think of peas and carrots, of course.

But Jesus and a whole load of sinners, they're not equal, are they? It's very out of balance. One perfect life for a whole load of messed up lives.

And tin of carrots, tin of peas, yeah, that's a substitute. But there's no sense of threat and loss, is there? The tin of peas doesn't bear punishment instead of the tin of carrots.

[12:39] It's just a swap. And, you know, perhaps if you take that home to think about it, what sort of substitution and exchange would help us to grasp the magnitude of what Jesus did for us?

He suffered, he lost so that we might gain. He sacrificed so that we might go free.

He bled and died under the wrath of God so that we would never have to experience the wrath of God. It's very difficult to find any human examples that go deep enough, isn't it?

He was one man, one righteous man for a whole load of messed up sinners. And, of course, Caiaphas is thinking, the way we do this is we make him die.

We force him to die. His will doesn't come into this. We arrest him. We kill him. His will doesn't come into this. But, in fact, Jesus died voluntarily, didn't he?

[13:52] He wasn't a conscript in an army. He was a volunteer. He, when his father, if we imagine it like this, when his father sort of proposed this, Jesus said, I will do this willingly.

And I will do this willingly because that miserable, obnoxious load of sinners, I care about them. I love them. I love them.

That's amazing, isn't it? Because I care about them, I willingly do this. And that's a big difference to what Caiaphas is intending. He suffers unjustly so that the rest go free.

Caiaphas was proposing something unjust, but in many ways is completely different to the real thing. So what did he say? He said a profitable calculation of substitution.

I suppose the nearest example is the Old Testament sacrificial system where the lamb dies instead of the people and that the blood is really important in that sacrifice.

[15:05] The people are under God's disapproving wrath. The lamb is the substitute. The lamb dies. The people go free. Of course, the thing about the Old Testament sacrificial system is it was an animal.

How can an animal pay for human sins? It just doesn't compute, really, does it? It's a sort of indication, but it can't possibly work.

And, of course, the lamb is not willing. The animal lamb is willing, but Jesus the lamb willingly sacrifices. So what was said, this is a substitution, which we just thought about a little bit.

And then a third point is why should we listen? Why should we listen to this? And I think it's a good question because Caiaphas is obviously not an apostle.

He's not a gospel writer. He's not even a friend of Jesus. He's an enemy of Jesus. And he's the one that's saying this. Why should we listen? Well, because what he said is true.

[16:11] And it says it in verse 51, doesn't it? Strangely, this man who, in many ways, had got completely the wrong idea, did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation, but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and to make them one.

Excuse me. So from that day on, they plotted to take his life. A little bit of a non sequitur. He was going to save people, so they decided they were going to kill him.

It doesn't really follow, does it? But they thought it did. Why should we listen? Because what he said is true. And John, the gospel writer, tells us that because he was high priest that year, he prophesied.

There was genuine spiritual insight, words of spiritual truth, even though Caiaphas didn't really know what he was saying. But the things he said were actually true, if you see what I mean.

And I think we can just pause to worship God, that he can use even his enemies to further his purposes. He can use even his enemies to speak truth, in this case, or to be instrumental in his purposes.

[17:35] And God is really great at doing that, isn't he? The Babylonians, who you thought had just smashed God's people out of control, they were doing what God wanted. They were instruments in his hand.

The Assyrians, who came and smashed the northern kingdom, God says, actually, you're like an axe in my hand. You do what I want, and when I've finished, I will put a hook in your nose and lead you back the other way.

There's God's sovereignty over even his enemies. And of course, at the death of Jesus, Jesus is going to die, and there is going to be this wicked, misunderstanding, malicious plot.

But even that malicious plot is according to the deliberate counsel and foreknowledge of God. So there's something about God's sovereignty. And I think if we have a good grasp of God's sovereignty, in other words, his control over all things at the deepest level, it's enormously comforting, isn't it?

That God works all things together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes. You know, the good things he works for good in our lives, and the bad things too.

[18:51] There's nothing that comes to us that doesn't come from the hand of the sovereign God and the lamb upon the throne, who is the one who is opening the seven scrolls, the seven seals of world history.

And I think it's worth pondering that, because we can get into a pickle, can't we? We can say, oh, everything's going wrong. Woe is me. But underneath that, we should say, actually, God is sovereignly in control of all this.

Don't know quite how, but there's something about God's, this is the word for this, sovereignty, meaning that he rules and arranges things according to his will.

Why should we listen? Well, it's a true insight into the heart of the matter. Christ died so that I would not die. It's a profitable calculation of substitution.

It's a true thing. And just coming back to the truth of this, you know, what we make of it, Paul says, how should we respond to these things?

[19:56] You know, when we look at this, when we grasp this truth, what does it do for us? And I'm just quoting Paul in Romans 8, verse 31, who says, what shall we say in response to this?

Good question. If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? If he gave his son, the whole providence, the whole future, is for God's people. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

It is God who justifies. Who is it that condemns? Christ Jesus who died, and more than that, was raised to life, is at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us.

So let's do the calculation. What do we make of this? What, sorry, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword, as it is written, for your sake we face death all day long, we are considered a sheep to be slaughtered?

[21:20] No, says Paul, looking at what Jesus did on the cross, I will say, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us, for I am convinced that neither death, nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present, nor the future, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I mean, that's what Paul makes of this. Well, amen. And, what does John make of it? Here is love. Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son, to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4.10. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son, as an atoning sacrifice, for our sins.

This is love. And, as we ponder this substitution, we are meant to come away saying, there is, it's not just profitable, here is the love of God, for me, for us, on display, written large, in big neon letters.

God loves his people. Christ so loved. God, the love of God, is poured out here, as we see it on the cross. There's a very helpful quote, from John Stevens, just that he had blogged, the other day, talking about languages of love.

[22:59] It's one of the things, that people talk about, isn't it? Different languages of love. You know, making a cup of tea, is a language of love. Giving flowers, is a language of love. Different languages of love. From God, God's language of love, is sending his son to die on a cross.

And our language of love, to him, is obedience. If you love me, you will keep my commandments, says Jesus. Why should we listen?

Well, because it's true. And the second reason, is because it's effective. And I just draw your attention, to those last few sentences, in which he says, Jesus would die, for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation, but also, for the scattered children of God, to bring them together, and make them one.

Very like John, to put it this way. Jesus didn't just come for Jews. He did come for Jews, but not only for Jews. He came for English people, and Spanish people, and Ecuadorian people, and Ethiopian people.

But she's not here, is she? She's not very well today. For different nationalities, and John sort of puts it, as the children of God, scattered, to bring, to gather, the second use of the word, gather, in this section, to gather them together, in one.

[24:44] So there's no privilege, so the Jewish people, don't say, we were here first, we're more saved, than other people. And the Gentiles, can't say that either, they're gathered together, in one.

They all, all alike, have fallen short, of the glory of God, and all alike, are saved by faith, in Jesus Christ. And I just want to, draw to your attention, the way this is put, as effective, that he died, that he died, to, bring them together, and make them one.

And I'll accept that, it's not put, put in an especially emphatic way, but it is put in a definite way. And what he doesn't say, is Jesus died, to have a go, at saving people.

It doesn't say, Jesus died, so he would make it possible, for people, if they felt like it, to be saved. But he wasn't quite sure, whether he would actually do that.

But he had, he sort of made the, made it possible. There's something quite, efficacious about it. There's something about his death, which makes sure, no one of his elect people, will be lost.

[25:57] To die, to gather into one, the children of God. There's a certainty, an efficacy there. And I'd just like to, savor that thought.

The death of Jesus, doesn't just make it possible, I mean it does make it possible, for me to be saved. The death of Jesus, you can say to anybody, if you trust in him, you will be saved.

Make that promise. And I make that promise, this morning. If you put your trust in Jesus, you will be saved. But I want to put it, back the other way, and say, he, effectively, saved us, on the cross.

There was something, that achieved, salvation, there. And him having died, and when he said, it is finished.

There was no doubt left, that he would save, the children of God, and bring them together, in one.

This efficacy. And, maybe, I mean, one way of looking at it is, have you got, have you seen, old school photographs?

[27:11] photographs. I'm on a Facebook group, where people are, sending in old school photographs. And, I don't know whether they do it nowadays, these photographs, where, all the children are lined up, all 300 of them, in rows, and, they're all sitting like this.

And, everybody's, got their hair done nicely. And, those photographs, they do them now, I don't know whether they do them nowadays. And, that's looking back, at the, how you were, when you were, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, whatever.

If you think, in the book of Revelation, there's a vision of the church, in the future, like that, in heaven, there they all are. And, somewhere, if you could look into that photograph, is you, if you're a believer.

That, he, has been tasked, with bringing, all his elect, safe to heaven. And, he will do so. And, he will do so. And, if you might think of it, as a, a huge family gathering, which has been planned. Now, we had a, the reason I'm saying this, because we had a family gathering, last couple of days. We haven't met together, as a family for years, I don't think. But, it's great to be together, with family.

[28:27] Well, I suppose it depends on your family, doesn't it? But, we, we, we, we had a good time together. And, please, imagine, the family of God, the date is fixed.

We don't know what it is, but, the date is fixed. The venue is booked. The caterers have been, engaged. It's going to be a great feast.

The tickets to get there, whether you're going to go by plane, or train, you know, I've actually got the ticket, so that's, you know, no worry about that. And, what a gathering it will be.

You know, you can imagine every, a family gathering. Lovely. Here's a great gathering, that Jesus is orchestrating, of all the children, all over the place, all his children, will bring together, and make them one, and we'll be together, on that great day.

And, I think that's, that's great. And, something that Jesus, would have us sort of, enjoy now, in prospect. Something to look forward to.

[29:36] Maybe you've got a nice holiday booked. This is better. Something to look forward to. Anyway, there we are. Why was this said? It was said because, Jesus is convincing, and because of concern, for the place of worship, and the community of God's people.

It was, what was said, a profitable, calculation, of substitution. Something that was reckoned, that would be better, as one dies, for, those that are under threat.

We are the beneficiaries. And why should we listen? Because, strangely enough, this sort of, almost random thing, that this guy said, is at the heart, of what it is to be a Christian.

It is at the heart, of everything, that the Son of God, died for his people, on the cross. And he didn't die, just having a go. There was an effectiveness, to what he did.

And I will just close, by asking, where are you on this? Where are you, as we've talked about it, have, are you like those people, that were impressed, and believed?

[30:43] And they went away, and many believed. Do you go away from here, believing? Now that's, that's for me. I'm trusting in the Lord, for this. Some of them, strangely, but truly, were repulsed, and they rejected Jesus. And in verse 53, it tells us, that they plotted, to take his life.

Now that might seem, a bit extreme. But in fact, there are only two, possible reactions, to Jesus.

Ultimately, you accept him, or you reject him. You accept him, or you reject him.

You believe him, or you don't believe him. You put your life, in his hands, or you refuse, to do that.

There are only two, responses, and please, make the right one.

Let's close, by singing, this, this is the result, of the calculation. What do we make of this? Here is love, vast as the ocean.

[31:49] Let's close.