

Christ Died for Us (Pre-Communion)

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[0 : 00] I'm going back with me to Romans chapter 5, page 942 of our church Bibles. And I'd like particularly to focus on verses 6, 7 and 8, not exclusively, but predominantly verse 6 to 8, where we read that for while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us, and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. I suppose we do have to ask ourselves, each time we have a preparatory service, what is it we're doing in this kind of service? And surely the answer comes, or should come clearly before us. We're preparing our hearts and minds to remember the Lord's death. We're preparing to take part in the Lord's Supper tomorrow, the act through word and sacrament in remembering Christ's death for us.

I mean, we're commanded to do so. We're commanded even to have a time of preparation. We're commanded to examine ourselves, to examine our hearts, to probe whether indeed we're truly aware of what we're about to do in remembering what Christ has done.

[1 : 33] Again, these two little words, for us. For us. And I would hate to think that any of us are simply going through the motions. We're here given this opportunity to direct our hearts towards the Lord Jesus, and to do it in gratitude.

To have thanksgiving in our hearts, even thanksgiving in the way that we worship, because we truly are giving thanks to the one who's given of himself for us.

And it's this aspect for us that really we want to focus our hearts and minds on this evening, because we are to examine ourselves. We are to, you know, examine the relationship that you have with the Lord Jesus.

You have to inquire, is this an active relationship? Is my relationship with the Lord Jesus, is it a growing relationship? Is it a relationship in which I trust in him the more and more each day? Or is it just something that I rarely do in giving to him my all in serving him? And, you know, the more that you think of what the Lord Jesus has done for us, what he's done in giving of himself for us, then, you know, this whole aspect of, you know, this great doctrine of substitution comes to the fore, what that substitution means for us.

[3 : 08] It's that great truth that, you know, Paul really rejoiced in when he wrote this chapter, chapter 5. And you see the number of times that even in these few verses, 6 to 8, that this little expression, for us, comes through.

You see it clearly, verse 6, Christ died for us, for the ungodly. Or you go to verse 7, one will scarcely die for a righteous person, perhaps for a good person one would dare to die, even to die.

Then verse 8, God shows his love for us. That while we're still sinners, Christ died for us. You see the frequency of what Paul is bringing before us, of this great teaching, this great doctrine of substitution, Christ for us, this great truth that he died for us, for sinners.

And it's not just, of course, here in this passage that we see this great truth, this great doctrine. Some 700 years before the Lord Jesus came to earth in human form, Isaiah wrote of that great doctrine.

Isaiah 53, the passage you know well in verse 4 to 5. Surely, he's borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

[4 : 27] And then these words. But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his stripes were healed. That great truth, that great doctrine of Christ dying for sinners. Christ bearing our griefs, our sorrows.

And as someone said of this great truth, even, you know, even reading that passage there in Isaiah 53, you know, few Christians, this person said, can read the passage without a profound sense of awe gripping their souls.

Awe that Christ should die for sinners such as ourselves. You know, the expression so often used of this truth in my place, condemned, he stood.

And then, again, echoing the words that Paul's written in Galatians 3, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

[5 : 33] We could go on and look again and again at this great truth expressed in these little words. But we do have to grasp, you know, the whole wonder of that truth, that substitution, Christ for us.

And so, we must express and have that wonder in our heart, as Paul surely had that wonder in his heart, that Christ should die for the ungodly.

And so, we really do need to start with what Jesus did as our substitute. Think, first of all, what he did in dying for us.

And then think of who Christ died for. And then, you know, just to grasp and wonder, you know, at the fact that it's the Lord Jesus Christ who performed this act of substitution.

So, let's look, first of all, at what Christ did as our substitute. Quite simply, and yet utterly profoundly, he died.

[6 : 43] The author of life died. And, you know, when we think of Christ's death, we do have to see it in terms of sacrifice. That's where you go back to the Old Testament.

You have to go back to the Old Testament and see the sacrifices that pointed to Jesus. It pointed to Jesus as the sacrifice, of course.

It was pointed to Jesus as the priest. The priest who offered the sacrifice and Jesus the sacrifice that was offered. And remember, in the Old Testament, as you see, sacrifices were offered on behalf of another.

You had the man who presented the animal sacrifices, and he did so because the animal would take his place. That animal would face death rather than the person who offered the animal in sacrifice.

It could have been a lamb, maybe it was a bull, or different kinds of sacrifices, of course. But there were animals that were offered without blemish. In other words, the best of the flock, the best of the herd.

[7 : 48] The priest would perform the actual action of sacrifice. The priest would make sure that the blood of the animal was shed, that the body was broken, that a life was given for another.

And that sacrifice that was offered to God, so that the person who offered the sacrifice wouldn't face the penalty for sin, that God demanded for sin.

And of course, these sacrifices pointed and point to the once-for-all sacrifice. They point to the one who came and who is and was without blemish of sin.

The sacrifice point to the one who was promised that were the people, as we were singing in one of the earlier psalms. He came and we might say, we say it reverentially, the best of his people, the sinless Son of God, the one whose blood would be shed and his body broken, his life given for others.

Christ died, and he died. And in his death, he fully satisfied God's righteous justice. His sacrifice was once and for all.

[9 : 08] The animal sacrifices couldn't fully satisfy God's justice. They were to be repeated again and again. But the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus is once and for all.

Remember, as Christ said on the cross, it is finished. It's accomplished. And of course, death was the penalty for sin.

We're reading there further in Romans chapter 5, the one man, Adam. Adam through Adam, sin entered the human race. He sinned, our representative sin.

Original sin infected the human race. Far more afflictive than any modern day virus. And certainly, infinitely more pandemic.

Why? Because the entire human race inherited, or has inherited, Adam's sin. Through one man, sin came into the human race.

[10 : 08] Through one man, death entered the human race. But through one man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through one man, man was atoned.

Those for whom Christ came to give his life. Man saved through the death of the Lord Jesus. And so, when you're preparing to remember the Lord's death, then we do have to, you know, dwell on that act of giving for us.

We have to dwell on the fact that it was the Lord Jesus Christ who did that dying. He, the sinless Son of God, died for the ungodly.

He took the penalty that our sins deserves. And notice, as we read there in verse 6 at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

And he emphasizes Christ who died. The name, and maybe even the title, Christ. Elsewhere, Paul speaks of Christ having died.

[11 : 13] 1 Corinthians 15 3 Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. Or Galatians 1 3 to 4 the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins.

And here he's emphasizing verse 6 Christ died. He emphasizes again verse 8 the very end of verse 8 Christ died for us. And even in our time of preparation this evening, think on what Paul's doing here in dwelling on Christ.

Think of who this is. And think of what he did. Think of what that's so unique in giving of himself. We're remembering the death of Christ.

We're remembering the one who, remember when Peter was confronted by Jesus and Peter said, surely you are the Christ. And so, you know, in our time of preparation, think of what's been said here that Christ died.

Well, Christ, of course, is the Greek word Christos, the word that means anointed. And of course, the word going back to the Hebrew word for anointed, the word Massa, which is Messiah.

[12 : 25] So, the one that was promised from old, the one promised in the Old Testament, the Messiah to come, the promised one, the anointed one, the one who was chosen to come to save his people.

Last Sunday evening when John Angus was preaching, remember, he spoke of the first announcement of the one to come to save his people in Genesis 3.15, the one who'd crushed the head of the serpent and so doing be bruised in that action.

But, you know, let's just focus on Christ. As we said, it's the word for anointed. Anointed, as we said in the Old Testament, the Hebrew language, from the word we get, Messiah.

And that's important. Anointed. Well, who were anointed? Kings were anointed. Priests did the anointing. Prophets would do the anointing as well.

In fact, even priests were anointed themselves. Elisha, for example, was anointed. That anointed, that being anointed to indicate that someone was being set apart for a particular work, whether it was a work of ruling, whether it was the work of serving, whether it was the work of proclaiming, proclaiming God's word.

[13 : 53] So, Christ, the word anointed, coming from the promise to come of one to be anointed, to be set apart for the work of ruling and serving and proclaiming.

And of course, this points to the Lord Jesus. This points to him, the anointed one. And, you know, when we think of the name Christ, it tells us of, you know, who he is in his office.

He's king. He's king. I mean, that's what we're singing in Psalm 18 there. Son of David, the royal one, the majestic one. I mean, we worship him as Lord of Lords, king of kings.

He's been anointed, anointed by the Holy Spirit to exercise his authority as king, to rule and to reign in the hearts of his people. He's come to establish his rule, establish his kingdom.

He's the Christ who reigns in power. And, we might also say he's the priest, you know, anointed. He's been anointed to serve, to serve his father, to offer himself up.

[15 : 01] That's that once for all sacrifice for sins. And, I think we can say too that he's the anointed prophet. Because, once he's done, he's revealed to the church the will of God, as our Catholicism tells us about Christ and his office as prophet, to reveal to the church the will of God.

Now, because the will of God is for men and women to be saved, to come to the Lord Jesus by faith. And, no salvation. He's come to proclaim, he's come to proclaim good news, salvation for sinners.

And, this is the Christ, the Messiah. This is the Christ who died the sinner's death. You know, when we think of that death, as we're told here, Christ died.

this is the death of the one who did not deserve death. We're told, of course, in Scripture, the wages of sin are death.

Paul actually mentions that at the end of the next chapter, chapter 6, the wages of sin are death. But, of course, Jesus never sinned. Jesus didn't inherit original sin.

[16:10] Jesus didn't commit one iota of any kind of sin at all and yet, we're told that he died. He paid the penalty that sin deserved, but he did nothing to deserve death.

And, that surely tells you this, even in your time of preparing to remember the Lord's death. He was undeserving of death, yes, that he was the sinless one who died. And, that surely then brings us to this whole point of substitution.

He died for us, the sinless one, for sinners. The saviour of sinners. I mean, you think of the love of the Lord Jesus in giving of himself for us.

Surely it speaks of the great love of the Lord Jesus. That love that is so great and is so great that he was willing to pay the price for your salvation.

And again, you know, when we just take time to dwell on that love, the love of Christ for us, the very fact that we're told that, you know, that prospect of his dying for sinners, that it filled him with joy.

[17:24] I mean, we're told in Hebrews 12, 2, that for the joy set before him, Jesus endured the cross. What was that joy? Surely that joy knowing that through his death, sinners would be saved eternally.

Through the death of the Lord Jesus, God and man reconciled. Grace given to sinners and that grace given through the death of the Lord Jesus.

And of course, that death was unique. Paul reminds us here in verse 7, for one will scarcely die for a righteous person, or perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die.

You know, when we think of it in human terms, in just ordinary human terms, you know, giving of self for another, it's a very commendable human trait. There are many, many examples of that kind of self-sacrifice in human history, I'm sure.

You could think offhand some of these particular examples, but, you know, that self-sacrifice, whether it's, you know, in particular circumstances, that no human self-sacrifice can even begin to compare with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for us.

[18:46] The sinless Son of God for, for who? For sinners. And, you know, again, as we prepare to remember the Lord's death for us, you know, just grasp in your heart that great love of the Lord Jesus that he should die for the ungodly, for you and for me.

And, you know, if you want to sort of grasp the extent of God's love for sinners, then it's here right before you in this chapter.

Just in these few verses, you know, we're seeing, you know, what Christ has done for you, for me, for all for whom he came to give his life.

Undeserving sinners. I am utterly unworthy of his dying for me. You are utterly unworthy of his dying for you. Why? Because we've offended a holy God.

Each one of us has offended by our sins the holy God. And we're powerless, powerless to save ourselves. As we see there, as the words that Paul uses in verse 6, particularly verse 6 and verse 8 and even verse 10, we're utterly unable to save ourselves.

[20:06] Why? Because as verse 6 tells us, we're weak. Again, verse 6, we're ungodly. Verse 8, we're sinners. Verse 10, we were God's enemies.

And I think we do need to take time just to look at these descriptions that tell us what we were before Christ saved us. You know, what you once were.

And that God responded to what you once were, not in wrath, but in love and is giving us the Son for you. Let's look at the first word there that we mentioned, weak. While we were still weak, maybe while we were still without strength, maybe even while we were still powerless, Christ died for us.

What's this weakness? What's this powerlessness? It's that utter inability to save ourselves. Too weak to rescue ourselves. Too weak to offer our own efforts to rescue ourselves from the wrath of God.

Why? Because sin has made us weak. We're utterly weak. We were utterly, you might say, depraved. We couldn't. It's impossible to save ourselves.

[21:20] Impossible for you, for me to make ourselves right with God. And that should surely tell you this, as you prepare to remember the Lord's death tomorrow.

It should surely tell you this. should speak to you of the amazing love of God towards you. You know, because by nature, we're utterly abhorrent to God.

Utterly abhorrent because of our sinful natures. Utterly abhorrent to the holiness of God. But what are we told here? Just at the right time.

That time appointed from all eternity. This moment of space and time God sends his son to deal with that problem of sin, man's problem of sin.

And what was that right time? When we were weak, when we were without strength, when we were unable to save ourselves. And only one man, only one had that power and that strength to save.

[22 : 27] And that was of course the Lord Jesus Christ. What did he have that enabled him to save? It was his perfect righteousness. It was his perfect sinlessness.

Only the Lord Jesus Christ could satisfy God's just demand for a sinless, perfect sacrifice to take away sin.

he did what no other could do in offering up himself as that perfect sinless sacrifice. We couldn't do it because of our weakness, our powerlessness.

But I think we can also say this, because of our powerlessness, our weakness, it means of course that we need a saviour. We need a saviour to save ourselves.

You couldn't, I couldn't know salvation without the Lord Jesus Christ. No one can enter heaven without first being gifted that faith to believe in the Lord Jesus, that faith to believe that he is the one who saves to the uttermost.

[23 : 40] And my good deeds are powerless to save. My religion in and of itself is far too weak to save me. Your head knowledge of scripture, it might be full of head knowledge, but that's unable to save you.

Only Jesus can save, does save, and has saved. Because he only had that power to defeat sin and Satan, the victor, us.

Again, we were singing off earlier. So, we've spoken about what we were, and Christ came to save us. We were weak. But then, also we're told in verse 6 that ungodly, Christ died for the ungodly.

And this word speaks of wickedness and rebelliousness. And, you know, when we get to the root of what Paul's saying here, we're seeing just how depraved and how distant in our sinful nature we were and we are distant from a holy God.

In other words, we're rebels against God. And, of course, people today don't like being told that the wicked are ungodly. It seems, you know, these words are just left for the extreme, so-called extreme cases that we read off in the pages of history.

[25 : 05] But God's word is clear. We're all ungodly, ungodly creatures, without the saving love of the Lord Jesus, and we'll remain ungodly unless our hearts are changed, unless our desperately wicked hearts are changed by the saving grace of our Saviour.

Again, you know, as we're preparing to remember the Lord's death, we prepare in humility, you know, that God should, the holy God should save the ungodly.

Surely that should bring us to our knees and humble thanksgiving and humble awe that the God who is holy should save and should send Christ for the ungodly.

You know, we were rebels. We were rebels deserving the utmost punishment, but we give thanks that God has rescued even rebels such as ourselves, because in his great love he deemed you precious.

So precious that Jesus came for you to give himself for you, weak, ungodly, sinned.

[26 : 26] But, well, what else are we told here that we were, sinners? Sinners. I mean, scripture tells us we've all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

We've all fallen short of the standard God requires, and each and every one of us are sinners.

We've inherited a sinful nature. We sinned against God.

We failed to keep God's law perfectly. But the amazing truth is this, that God has given the sinner hope. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I know I'm a sinner. You know you're a sinner. But you know that in Christ you have that freedom from the dominion of sin.

We're looking at this more again tomorrow. You know that in Christ that you're right with God because of Christ's righteousness.

[27 : 24] And you know that you're right with God even though, yes, you still sin. It's what Martin Luther famously declared, well he wrote it in Latin of course, but he said about simultaneously righteous and sinner.

Righteous and sinner at the same time. Simul justus epiketor. Righteous and sinner at the same time. But you know we know that we're unworthy of all the privileges that we're going to receive tomorrow in the Lord's Supper but we still come because we're told the meals for sinners.

Remember Jesus in the upper room in that supper just before his crucifixion when he celebrated the Passover. What did he do there? He shared a supper.

He shared that meal with sinners. He's bidding you to come to share in that communion supper tomorrow with him. And so we rejoice that we've been given this invitation.

Yes we know by sin, through sin, that we've offended a holy God. But we know that he's reconciled us by his love.

[28 : 38] That love that's rescued sinners and called sinners to himself. and I think we do need to be reminded that we are sinners coming to the Lord's table but sinners saved by grace.

And you will have heard the story. I'll mention it again because I do think it's one that we can relate to even though we're in a different time, maybe even in a different culture. The story of Michael Kate of La Caron, you know this once hardened sinner, wonderfully converted, led to the communion table so fully aware of her sins.

This woman who was infamous for her sins so long ago, I mean reluctant to take the supper, but the minister Lachlan Mackenzie is saying the famous words, take it, it's for sinners.

And the reported comments that this lady made afterwards, I think we can echo even in our own heart, in 2020, tell them that the worst of sinners, the drunkard, the thief, the blasphemer, the liar, the scoffer, the infidel, tell them that I, a living embodiment of every sin, even I have found a saviour's person, even I have known a saviour's love.

Even I, we can echo these words, even I have known a saviour's love. We come to the table, yes, as sinners, but saved sinners, because the saviour of sinners died for us, weak and godly sinners.

[30 : 16] And then one more, I think, to mention, verse 10, enemies. Enemies. That's a strong word to use. Enemies. You know, sinners is a strong word to use, ungodly is a strong word to use.

Enemies is very emotive. You know, because enemy conjures up a picture of war, conflict, you know, different sides in conflict and combat.

That's what we're told here. What we were towards God. And what we were before God. Enemies. And enemies by our own choosing.

And God declaring us his enemies. Again, this brings out the great love of God. You know, when we were in that state of enmity against God, God, enmity with us.

You know, we were his enemies because of our sinful nature. We were an affront to his holiness. But God loved us even when we were his enemies.

[31 : 16] He reconciled you to him when you were his enemy. And he did it by the gift of his son for you, for us. again, this should stop us in our tracks and just dwell in the love of God.

God loving his enemies. You were an enemy of God. God brought you into his kingdom, into his fellowship. No longer now an enemy of God, but a friend of God.

And if you were once an enemy, since you were once an enemy, can I say by grace, you can never be at enmity with God eternally.

Now yes, we all do it, I do it, we backslide, we sin, we grieve him, we can yield to temptation, but you're loved eternally by God.

You'll never be lost because you're saved forever. Christ died for you. His death achieved full salvation. His death achieved for you full peace with God.

[32 : 25] You've been saved eternally from God's wrath. And so, you know, these are just a few thoughts to help us in our time of preparation. Thoughts from God's word, from God's truth, to assure you of your salvation, your eternal security in him because Christ died for you.

love that reached out to the ungodly, to the weak, to sinners, to God's enemies.

And you know, thinking of all these expressions, then none of us can ever even have a single thought about any kind of self-righteousness that we might think we have before God.

None of us can even bring before God even a fraction of any kind of righteousness. But no, we fix our eyes on Jesus.

We fix our eyes on him. And as we do so, as you do so, be filled in your heart with that thanksgiving, that joy in your heart, that God didn't leave you to yourself, but he provided that way of escape, that way through the way, the Lord Jesus.

[33 : 44] So, yes, prepare your heart, even now through this service. Look forward to it. Look forward with thanksgiving. Look forward to that opportunity that God is giving each one of us.

Through a meal, through a communion meal, through a fellowship meal, that God gives us to remember the Lord's death till he comes. Amen. Let us pray.

Lord, this is a precious time to remember all that you have done for us in giving of your Son for us.

And Lord, help us then, we pray, not to dismiss that truth, not to cast to one side these great promises of salvation in and through the Lord Jesus.

But Lord, deep in our faith, deep in our trust, that we will truly rejoice in you. So hear us, Lord, as we wait upon you.

[34 : 45] Hear us, Lord, as again we sing praise before you. Bless us, each one we pray. And all we do and say is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 51. Traditional section on page 281.

Page 281. And we'll sing just three stanzas from verse 9 down to verse 13. O mine iniquities blot out, thy face hide from my sin.

Create a clean heart, Lord, renew a right spirit, me, with a 9 to 13. Psalm 51. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.