

Something to Die For

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[0 : 00] Oh, if you are one of the kiddos that's supposed to go to the back, now's the time to do it. Okay? Takes me just a second to get, man, listen to you. I love that. I was in Psalms this morning in devotions.

Psalms 27. I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy.

I will sing and make melody to the Lord. I like singing about our Savior, don't you?

Well, I suppose you tire a little bit of hearing me talk about how long I've been at this, but bear with me.

[1 : 29] One of the things that comes with preaching around holidays and times where I think it's appropriate to focus your thoughts scripturally in particular around things that relate to what's going on around you.

It so happens that when you come to Christmas year after year after year, it's not like you can choose a new passage. There aren't that many. And the tendency is, is we are very inclined to kind of lock in on the idea, I've heard that before, and kind of tune out.

And I would appeal to you that that is not why God has you here this morning. I do want you to look at a passage that you may not normally connect with Christmas.

Turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 10, and we're going to pick up in verse 35. Mark chapter 10, verse 35.

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said to him, Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.

[2 : 45] And he said to them, What do you want me to do for you? By the way, just stop for a second. Do you think Jesus didn't know what they were going to ask? No.

But sometimes it's appropriate to go ahead and let a person fully reveal what's inside. How many of you have learned that the hard way, right? Sometimes you think you know what somebody else is going to say.

Jesus did know. But giving them an opportunity to talk about it brings it right out in front. And so Jesus asked them, Say, Hey, what would you like me to do? And verse 37, they said to him, Grant us to sit one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory.

How noble. How thoughtful. How like an apostle, right? I mean, hey, you know, we're willing to wait. But eventually, we would like brothers, one on your right, one on your left. Jesus said to them, You do not know what you're asking.

[3 : 52] Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? They said to him, We are able.

And Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink you will drink. And with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized. But to sit on my right hand or on my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.

And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. Don't you like righteous indignation? How many of you have ever had righteous indignation at other people's frailties and failures?

You ever been there? It's like, I can't believe it. You know, it's like, not me. Yeah. Well, here they are. They're indignant. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

It shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

[5 : 05] For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. It's very easy for us to get caught up in a very natural mindset of what's in it for me.

Christmas is a time that I found myself asking some of our younger children this morning, So what are you getting for Christmas?

And I was surprised at how often kids actually know. I mean, you know, after all, they make a wish list, right? And they let their parents know. But I know some children, some devious little ones, that go around shaking packages.

How many of you have had your children shake packages? I see the look, you know. How many of you go ahead and pay attention to not only what you're getting, but what you think your brothers and sisters are getting, kind of put it all together to kind of be sure there's equity, propriety.

Everything's done, you know. It's like, hey, what's in it for me? What's in it for me? That is a natural and normal pattern of thinking.

[6 : 22] Wouldn't you agree with that? And we do pretty good at thinking about what's in it for me. There are all kinds of little things I hear people say that indicate that that's where their thinking is.

One of the best ones I really like is, I didn't sign up for that. How many of you ever heard that phrase? I didn't sign up for that. Really? By the way, who signed you up?

If you're thinking you signed up for it, you may not understand that there is a father in heaven that is in control of some of the fine print on your contract.

And I want us to think this morning in a completely different way. And to recognize that when we come to the matter of Christmas, it's important for us not to get caught up in the world's thinking.

So let's ask ourselves the question, what is Christmas really all about? What is Christmas about? If you were to ask retailers, they would tell you what?

[7 : 22] Christmas is all about them having the best possible opportunity of making money because between Thanksgiving and Christmas, guess what? You hope that people blow the wad and buy everything that you have managed to think was important to them and that you end up being fat and happy and everything works well.

Workers tend to look at Christmas and think, huh, it's a holiday. It's a time to rest. I remember talking with someone out in Colorado, a man that's moved from here to there, and he was talking about the fact that from something like the, yeah, this Sunday on to the end of the year, they have no work.

They're on vacation for the next basically two weeks. That's pretty nice, right? So Christmas is about relaxing. Kids, you know what they think Christmas is about?

How many of you remember being kids? Some of you are older here, but I remember that Christmas is where I finally got to get what I thought I was getting. And with ambition and anticipation, you know, Christmas Eve, I was thinking tomorrow I'm going to get what, you know, and it was all about.

And my parents, that was the one day in the year that my father as a surgeon did not get up early. I don't know how it worked out, but he actually slept in, you know, 7, 730.

[8 : 47] And it was probably the only day in the year that I wanted to get up early. And so there was kind of that fine balancing act between making enough noise so they knew we were up and not making too much noise that you'd really get in trouble for being obvious.

How many of you understand that kind of gentle midpoint? Well, when we think about the matter of Christmas, we have to recognize that Christmas really isn't something that is focused on us and our thoughts, but it is focused on the purposes that God has in our salvation.

And if there's any passage that puts this clearly in front of us, it would be one such as this that make it very, very clear that Jesus came to save us, and more specifically, he came to die for our sins.

And I think that's important for us to get our head around and recognize that the fact of the matter is this, is that Christ's coming was principally to address the issue of sin in our life and to care for it in perspective of the matter of salvation.

And so when we think about Christmas and we think about his birth, it's important for us to step beyond the matter of presents that we're getting and think about what is the value of what Christmas means in the larger scope of our own eternal destiny.

[10 : 06] See, Christmas is about God sending his son to live a perfect life and die on the cross to pay the penalty for us. I appreciate that song that John picked out and we sang just before, reminding us of the purpose of Christ's coming.

You see, this theme of Christ being our Redeemer and the one who made atonement for our sins runs right through Scripture, kind of a central thread and one that we shouldn't lose sight of. Beginning all the way back in the book of Genesis, and I want you to turn, we're going to kind of spot ourselves in a couple different passages just to firm up our thinking about the matter of the centrality of Christ's sacrifice for our sins running from beginning to end.

In Genesis chapter 3, let me read the passage to you just for a moment. Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, here is God speaking after Adam and Eve had sinned and God comes to address the issue. Look at what he says in verse 15. I will put enmity between you and the woman, talking to the serpent, and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

[11 : 24] There is what is called by some theologians there the proto-evangelum. In other words, it's the first indication of the gospel that we find in the Scripture.

Here is God speaking to man who, after he had sinned, is told, I have a plan and it will be my son that will die for your sins, and he, by his death, is going to break the bondage and the power of sin over your life.

It's interesting when you stop and really think about it. Here is God who earlier had said to man, the soul that sins, it will what? It will die. God had made it clear that there is a penalty for sin.

And yet Adam and Eve, unwilling to listen and believe, had gone ahead and committed the sin. And God says, I have a remedy, and it will be through someone who is born who is going to address the problem.

We find this theme of God's provision flowing throughout the Scriptures. Let me have you look at another passage as well. Over in Isaiah chapter 53, Isaiah chapter 53, as Isaiah is writing about the coming of our Lord Jesus, he makes it very, very clear that his coming is in relationship to sacrifice and to our sin.

[12 : 44] Let me read just for a portion here in Isaiah chapter 53, verse 4. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was wounded for what? What was he wounded for? Our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Let me stop just for a moment.

How many of you recognize that sin is something that, truthfully, we are far more comfortable with than we should be? Do you recognize that? Let me stop and have you think just a little bit further in that.

There may be some of you here that in the last week have said some things you really wish you hadn't said. Anybody out there that can identify with that? I'm waiting.

Oh, good, good, good. How many of you have not only said some things that you were really sorry you said, but also have done some things that you really wish you could take back?

[13 : 48] Let me kind of work your way through this so you can understand. The things we act on generally have more traction than the things we say. Agreed?

The things we think are at the far end of the food chain, and we're really not all that bothered by the things that we think often that are absolutely ungodly.

Would you agree with that? But the truth of the matter is is that all sin is equally offensive to God.

And we need to recognize that the fact that he was willing, coming back here to verse 5, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, we tend to think, well, what was so bad that he had to suffer like this for our sin?

It is because all sin is equally and supremely offensive to a holy God, and when we engage in sin, it has to be remedied. And so as you work your way through this passage, one of the things that you see very, very clearly is that God was willing to send his son, the Lord Jesus, to make atonement for our sin, to pay the penalty for it.

All we like sheep have gone astray, we've turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him, what? The iniquity of us all. The Lord put, the Father put on Jesus the weight and the penalty, the consequences, the wrath of God against sin, he put it on Jesus instead of on us.

[15 : 23] It's not just in the passage in Isaiah that we see the truth of Jesus being our sacrifice. We find over and over again as you work your way through, it appears over and over.

In Matthew 1, verse 21, when the birth of Jesus is announced, it says, for he shall save his people from their sin.

In John 1, verse 29, when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming, he said, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was looking at the Lord Jesus, and he made the announcement, there is the one who is going to satisfy and deal with the sin problem that we have. It's amazing when you ask people what is the biggest problem that they have, the kind of answers that you get. If you're in a hospital, a person thinks to themselves, well, man, I'm having health problems. I'd really like something done about that.

If the person is in financial difficulty, guess what? I really need more money. If the person is two days away from the absolute most important exam of their life, guess what they're thinking about? [16:34] Oh, man, I really need help passing this exam. The truth of the matter is, none of those things are worthy of being compared to the matter of our sin. And the matter is, is that God sent the Lord Jesus to be the sacrifice and the satisfaction for our debt and our sin.

I want you also to think with me of what Jesus is saying here in Mark, and let's go back to that passage just for a moment. Mark chapter 10, verse 45, for even the Son of Man, he's talking to his disciples, and the disciples' interest is, so what am I getting out of this?

What am I going to receive? And let me tell you something. When people go into marriage with the attitude of, hey, what am I getting out of it, guess what they're going to discover? They're going to discover that their dissatisfaction and their misappropriated interest is going to cause them heartache that will only grow until they come to grips with the selfishness and the darkness of their own heart.

What happens when we go into ministry or into church or into any kind of relationship where the only focus we have is on what am I going to get out of it? It's going to be heartache.

And here is Jesus, on the other hand, saying, let me tell you something. Instead of having that mindset, I want you to think about the attitude and heart that I have, and here it is. For even the Son of Man, sinless, perfect, holy, wonderful, even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.

[18:13] And so as you think about what this passage tells us, it makes it very, very clear that the Lord Jesus Christ, in His coming, came principally to do this, to satisfy the debt of our sin and to have it wiped away.

I wonder this morning whether or not that really strikes you, whether it really makes a difference in your thinking, whether you stop this morning and think, man, I am so very thankful that the focal point of Christmas is not the gifts that I get, but the fact that Jesus came to be my Savior and to die for my sins.

Well, let's come to another practical question as we think about the matter of this verse. And I want you to think with me about why the atonement is so important. Why is the atonement so important? One of the things that is sadly missed in our contemporary culture is the fact that right and wrong is largely missing. I remember thinking to myself, well, now that the election is passed, all the political wrangling and jangling is going to kind of diminish a little bit.

How many of you have been stunned to realize that's not the case? I mean, every time you turn on the news, they're just flapping their gums about one thing or another in relationship to politics.

[19:33] And it just reminds me, politics is really just a conflict of worldviews. And here we have people that are all wrapped up in believing that one side or another is really the key to the whole thing.

And in the middle of all that is the reality that the majority of people involved in what we see going on today really have no moral compass.

I was intrigued to realize that Facebook is going to work to prevent, what is it called, fake news? How many of you figured out that it's all fake news more or less?

You know, I'll never forget when Paul David Tripp said this, everybody has an agenda. Everybody has an agenda.

And as you listen to people today, you recognize that their agenda is self-serving. And so here we live in a world where the issues of right and wrong are largely kind of pushed over to the side and the question is, does it work and does it accomplish my end and my objectives?

[20:42] It's amazing when you stop and think that rational, intelligent individuals who would never for a moment deny the laws of gravity, who would admit that thermodynamics and all the laws related to that are absolutely essential and cannot be violated.

At the same time, think that the same God who put those laws into place and also made moral laws that you can get away with violating moral laws while you can't get away with violating laws such as the law of gravity.

You know, if I were to step off this platform, how many of you recognize what the immediate consequence would be? If I stepped off, what happens? I go down. By the same token, the God of this universe also made a law in which He says this, the soul that sins, it shall, there is a consequence for sin.

And that consequence cannot be overlooked. There's no way around it. By the way, we tend to wish God dealt with other people's sins fairly rapidly.

Do you realize that? We tend to believe God doesn't deal with ours the same way. And why I say that is this, is that I'm amazed, I'm amazed to be around individuals on occasion who are fully persuaded that their sins will not have eventual consequence.

[22 : 19] But they do. God is not mocked. What a man sows, that a man will, he'll reap. And so I want you to recognize this morning when you think about why Jesus came, He actually came to make atonement for us.

And why is that? Because the truth, the righteousness, and the justice of God must be satisfied. God can no more overlook sin than we can overlook breathing.

His nature requires that sin be dealt with and He can't violate that nature. When there is sin, it must be atoned for or it must be punished.

He cannot overlook the rebellion and the harm that sin does. And though He is long-suffering and patient, we know for one, or for several reasons, His long-suffering patience, for one, is designed to lead people to repentance, gives them time to repent.

But let me tell you another thing. God's long-suffering patience also allows individuals to be fully hardened in their sins so that when He does judge, they can't say, I didn't mean it and I was just careless and not thinking carefully about the outcome.

[23 : 36] When we sin, we do so intentionally and we do so with intent that has been developed in our heart. And so I want you to recognize this morning that God's nature is such that when sin takes place, there's consequences for it.

And the significance of His judgment against sin is proportionate to His glory and His significance, not to ours. Let me give you an explanation, maybe identify with.

I remember when I was growing up, my parents took us through, we were traveling back from India and we came through Rome and we went to St. Peter's.

Great place. Phenomenal. And I remember at St. Peter's actually having the privilege of going on a, I'd never seen one of these things in India, but you stood on the thing and it just kind of, what's it called?

Not an escalator. A moving walkway, yeah. In order to walk past the Madonna and Child, this carving by Michelangelo, they put you on a moving walkway.

[24 : 42] Do you know why that was? So that everybody had an equal chance for him. There it was. You know, you kind of went by. And just imagine that, you know, there I was and I decided, you know what, I want to do something spectacular.

So I took out a little hammer and dinged that thing. That would be a pretty offensive act, wouldn't it? Direct, if I smashed a clay cup, no big deal, but putting a ding in the Madonna and Child because of the significance of that statue would be something that would be offensive.

When we sin against God, we violate His holiness and our sin is amplified and magnified by the significance of the one we sin against.

And so what's the penalty for that? The Bible makes it clear. The soul that sins, it shall die. And God's goodness and His wisdom, God's holiness is of such infinite value that there is no remedy for that sin apart from death.

And what happens in death is that after death there is judgment that lasts forever. And so when you think about that, I want you to understand that when Jesus died on the cross, He died to make atonement or substitute to satisfy God's judgment against us.

[26 : 02] Let me bring several verses to your attention this morning to have you think about. Turn in your Bibles from Mark over to Hebrews chapter 9. Hebrews chapter 9.

Looking at verse 26 and then 28. Let me explain it this way.

The infinite penalty for a sin against an infinite God requires an infinite remedy.

Do you got that? The infinite sin against an infinite God requires an infinite remedy and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at verse 28. So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him. Interesting, earlier in the week I had an opportunity to talk with an individual and ask them the question, so what's going to happen when you die? I don't know. I said, do you have any idea where you're going to go?

[27 : 26] Well, I suppose I'm going to heaven. Oh, okay. Why? Because I'm a pretty good person. I like being around pretty good people. So I said, how good are you?

And, well, that's when things began to break down a little bit. You know, it's like, how good are you? Well, I really am pretty. At least I'm better than my neighbor. You know, and here's the fact of the matter.

Sin is supremely offensive to God and He is not going to overlook a single piece of it. And so when you stop and recognize that what the Scripture says, Jesus had to die for our sins to satisfy the debt.

And so here we are looking at that passage and reminding ourselves of the fact that Jesus died for our sins. Don't ever buy into the idea that you may satisfy the debt of your sin by your own behavior and your own efforts.

Why is that? Because even in our own best efforts, we are really looking to do what? You know? To serve ourselves, bring glory to ourself, and we're self-focused.

[28 : 35] Only Christ can satisfy the debt of our sin. Let me have you look at one other passage in relationship to this over in 1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1, verse 18 and 19.

Again, reminding us of Christ's coming and purpose. 1 Peter 1, verse 18. Knowing that you were ransomed from the feudal ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, can you imagine that?

Going to a religious leader and saying, okay, I've sinned. What do I need to do? Well, you need to burn X number of candles, and you need to give X number of dollars, and you need to do such and such, and that will accommodate your sin.

No, no, no. You were ransomed from the feudal ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. I want you to understand this morning as we think about why Jesus came, recognize this. Jesus came to take the full weight of my sin and your sin and to die in my place.

[29 : 50] What He did was He atoned for our sin by stepping in and taking our place and satisfying the penalty for our sins. So how does that fit my life?

How does that fit your life? Every person that is here this morning is in one of two conditions. Only one of two conditions.

You are either here as a person who has come to realize by the grace of God that you stand condemned before a holy God and that Christ Jesus came to pay the penalty for your sins and realizing that you're a sinner you've cried out and said I confess that I'm a sinner and I deserve judgment but God sent His Son to be my sacrifice and substitute and I believe in what He has done for me.

Or you are here this morning thinking about Christmas and thinking about yourself and failing to recognize that the day is coming where you will give an account for your sin to God and you having overlooked what God has done for you will endure eternal judgment because you've denied God's plan and His purpose in sending Christ to be the Savior of the world.

Periodically when I ask individuals the question so why should God let you into heaven and they tell me well I'm working hard at making my way my answer or a question that follows up at and particularly around this season is hey so why would God send His Son to die on the cross if you could get to heaven by your good works?

[31 : 34] Do you follow that? No. The reason God sent His Son is because we cannot save ourselves by our own good effort and here's the fact God having sent His Son and we turning around and saying I don't need His help and I don't need His sacrifice and I don't need Him as my Savior is a supremely offensive thing to God and I would appeal to you this morning if you are here today and you do not know Christ don't walk out of here this morning saying I really don't care about this matter of sin because the day of judgment is coming and I would appeal to you that you don't walk out of here saying listen I really don't care why Jesus came He came to be your Savior and the day is coming when you will stand before Him and give an account and I would plead with you

today is the day of salvation now is the hour to repent and confess and believe on Jesus let's close in prayer our Father God this morning as we remind ourselves of why Jesus really came we're so very thankful that He came to be our sacrifice to make atonement for our sins and this morning as we bring this service to a close we remind ourselves that Christmas is about more than gifts that we receive it's about the gift that you gave us of salvation through the Lord

Jesus Christ and I pray Lord for those that are here today that know Jesus as their Savior that their life reflects their thankfulness for their salvation I pray also for those that are here today that do not know the Lord Jesus that today they would not walk out of here resisting and refusing the offer of salvation through the finished work of Christ you work that you might be glorified and we ask this in Jesus name Amen let's pray