

Christ Alone (Evening Service)

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[0 : 01] Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name, Amen. Hello again. I don't think I introduced myself, I'm Aaron. If you haven't met me before, I look after the service.

So as James explains, so we're celebrating 500 years since the Reformation. Each week we're going to look at a key player, and each week we're going to look at one of the five great gospel truths that were recovered because of the Reformation.

Those five sort of slogans are grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone, scripture alone, glory alone. And we looked at grace alone last week. If you weren't here, you should listen to that just to give you sort of catch you up to speed on more about the Reformation there.

So today we're looking at Christ alone. Now I thought it might be helpful if we, before we get into the passage, just spend like one minute looking at the situation that met the Reformers in the 16th century.

So what was the problem that the Reformers were addressing with their slogan, Christ alone? Do you get that? What was the issue that the Reformers were addressing when they came up with the slogan, Christ alone?

[1 : 14] As I mentioned next week, at the time of the Reformation, the medieval church, it was a dark place. There was a lot of corruption. Last week I talked about the practice of simony.

Simony is where you could buy the position of bishop and people would do that because it was a very sort of well-respected and powerful position in the 16th century. Called simony because in Acts there was a guy called simony who tried to buy the Holy Spirit from the disciples.

Another example is priests. Now could, we're supposed to obviously be celibate at the time, but some priests took mistresses and some bishops, now this is not widespread, it's not everyone doing this, but some bishops turned a blind eye and said, okay, well you can keep your mistress, but you have to pay a special tax, like a mistress tax.

And so you pay that every year and you can hang on to your mistress and if you have a baby with this mistress, you have to pay more money, right? So again, various points in the history of the church around this sort of medieval period, popes were sort of like trying to knock it on the head and at various times they kind of sort of let it happen because it was a bit of a money spinner.

So a dark time. But the darkest thing about this time in the medieval church was the obscuring of the gospel. That was the darkest thing, the obscuring of the gospel. So the gospel is about what?

[2 : 30] It's about what Christ has done for us. But see, the medieval church turned the gospel into what we must do in order to benefit from the gospel.

And how do they do that? And here's the major focal point of the dispute between the reformers and the medieval church at the time. So the Roman church constructed this elaborate sacrificial system in which people will sort of process through and you had to participate in it in order to be saved.

So you had to be under a priest. The priest mediated your relationship with God. You had to participate in all the sacraments. You prayed to the saints. The saints prayed to God. There was penance. There was armsgiving.

There was confession. You had to be part of this particular church, this huge system. And the result was the church effectively controlled and owned salvation.

They commoditized salvation. And the reformers said, no, no. They said, you're clouding the work of Christ. You're adding all these things in, these systems, these assistants, these extra things.

[3 : 29] They said Rome was preaching Jesus and. It's the gospel of Jesus and. Jesus and the church. Jesus and communion. Jesus and the saints.

And the reformers said, no, it's Christ alone. Salvation is Christ alone. This is what Martin Luther said. I must listen to the gospel. It tells me not what I must do, but what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for me.

So I imagine the Roman church was thinking it was quite helpful. But by adding all these extra things, the medieval church was implicitly saying this. It was implicitly saying, Jesus' work on the cross was not enough to save you.

There is stuff you have to do, and we'll manage that process for you. So that's a summary of the problem the reformers were addressing when they came up with the slogan, Christ alone.

The slogan is not saying the church is unimportant. It's not saying priests are unimportant. It's not saying their confession is unimportant. What it's saying, it's about the sufficiency of Christ in saving us, which the reformers said the medieval church undermined through this very elaborate sacramental system.

[4 : 45] Now, let's get to the passage. It helps us understand this. Romans 8, 31 to 39. The basic argument of the passage is this. Given what Christ has done, what can threaten our standing with God?

The answer is nothing. That's the basic argument of the passage. Let's go one level deeper again. How Paul helps us see that is by asking these questions.

The passage is mostly sort of questions, right? And the questions have these two forks. They address internal and external pressures, i.e., is there anything in us, or can anything happen to us that will separate us from God's love?

And the answer is no. You can be assured you are good with God because it rests on Christ's work alone. Okay. That's the passage at another level of deepness.

Now, let's go right into the logic of it. Okay. I really like the start of it. It's helpful to have your Bibles open. I really like the start of the passage, Romans 8, 31 to 39. I love the start. What shall we say to these things?

[5 : 54] That's how he starts. What shall we say to these things? You get the feeling he's quite excited, right? He just wants to sort of just tell you all about it. What shall I say about these things? And then he begins with this huge rhetorical question.

If God is for us, who can be against us? I love that. He's saying, I really want you to think about this. Like, I really want you to wrestle with this.

It's like, if you're feeling insecure about your salvation, argue yourself out of it through this question. If God is for us, who can possibly be against us?

If Christ has saved us, who can mess that up? You might think, well, I can think of lots of things. True. There are lots of things. But can any of them overturn God's verdict on your life?

And God's verdict on your life is, you are forgiven because of Christ's work. Can any of these things, can you think of anything that's going to change God's mind about you? No.

[6 : 55] And then verse 32. It's like he's saying, no, really, really, really think about this. Let me give you an example, he says. Verse 32. He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

So how do you know somebody loves you? By what they're willing to sacrifice for you. What they're willing to give up for you. I love my wife. I gave up my country for her.

Lived in her hemisphere. I gave up a whole half of the earth. This is being recorded, right?

Because she's not here. I wanted to hear this. God gave up the most precious thing in the world to him. God gave up the most precious thing there is to him.

He gave up his own son. Do you notice it said that? He would spare his own son. God has one son. We're sons and daughters by adoption, but he has one son.

[8 : 03] And he gave up his own son for us. Like, I'm a nice guy, but I'm not going to, in a million years, I'm not going to give up any of my children to benefit my enemies. But this is what God did.

So the logic of the verse is a kind of a greater, lesser logic, if you get that. If God did this amazing thing, surely he's going to do this other thing. If somebody gives you a kidney, they're probably going to give you a dollar, right?

That's kind of the basic argument. If God is willing to give up his son, won't he give you all things, it says? That's the argument.

Now, what is all things? Well, all things is not all things we need to live a comfortable middle-class life. That's not what it's saying. It's not saying God will give you a nice car and God will give you a boyfriend, a girlfriend, a good job.

It's not saying that. It's talking about all the things we need to be saved. God has provided a way for us to be with him for eternity. He's secured that, and we cannot add to it.

[9 : 06] He's given you everything you need to be saved. He's sorted that out. In the words of the Reformers, it's Christ alone. It's not Christ plus sacraments. It's not Christ plus the priests. It's not Christ plus our regular quiet time.

In Christ, God has given us everything we need for salvation. Verse 33 and 34, look at those. It's the passage that says, Who's going to bring any charge against God's elect?

It reminds me of the woman caught in adultery in the Gospels, who the zealots are going to throw stones at her, are going to stone her, and Christ says, He who is without sin cast the first stone, and they take off, and then he says to her, Look around.

Who's around you? Who's accusing you now? They're all gone. This is what it's trying to say. No one can accuse you.

Now, verse 33 and 34 are for people who think, Yes, but this all sounds lovely, but you don't know me, though. Like, I'm a bad Christian. I feel guilty all the time.

[10 : 13] I carry so much shame in my life. I don't do enough. There is so much sin in my life. Folks, you might think you're a bad Christian. Let me tell you. You're worse than you think.

That's my encouragement to you. How come no one's writing this stuff down? This is gold. You're worse than you think. There is stuff in your heart that you have no idea about.

You're worse than you think. But none of that darkness can bring you back into condemnation under God because of the work of Christ alone.

So if you want to live a joyful Christian life, a peaceful Christian life, peace in your heart, we've got to get past this idea that our acceptance with God is based on our shaky performance.

Folks, if you don't have a Christ alone understanding of salvation, you will keep thinking that perhaps God will reopen your case, that perhaps he'll change his mind about you and kick you to the curb.

[11 : 21] God is not reopening your case. In terms of salvation, it is locked in. And you might think, oh, but about me? No, you don't get to decide. You don't decide for God.

He decides for us about salvation, and he grabs a hold of us, and he doesn't let us go because we relate to God through Christ's performance and not our own performance.

We've got to get this in our head. We've got to get this in our hearts. So given what I said, verse 34, who is around to condemn you? And again, you might think, I condemn myself.

I've got this little tape recorder playing in my head, reminding me of all the bad stuff I do, all the sins of the past. Maybe you have an unkind friend who reminds you of the things that you're not very good at, and you've got that playing in your head who tells you you're not a good Christian.

Maybe you've been listening to some really terribly moralistic sermons online that are just sort of bringing you down. Folks, none of those charges, imagine it's a court setting, none of those charges laid against you, whether it's your own talk or the incident or whatever, none of those things can stick.

[12 : 32] There is nothing anyone can say, even the voice in your own head. There is no accusatory voice which will change God's mind about you. You are his because of Christ's work.

Listen to Charles Spurgeon on this. Actually, the quote is printed on the back of the service sheet. Spurgeon was a 19th century Baptist preacher. Fantastic. Let me read these words to you.

All these are thoughts about self. So he's referring to a previous sentence there. All these are thoughts about self. We shall never find comfort or assurance by looking within, but the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self, and he tells us that we are nothing, but that Christ is all in all.

Remember, therefore, it's not thy hold of Christ that saves thee. It is Christ. It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee. It is Christ. It's not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument.

It is Christ's blood and merits. Therefore, look not so much to thy hand with which thou art grasping Christ as to Christ. Look not to thy hope, but to Jesus, the source of thy hope.

[13 : 43] Look not to thy faith, but to Jesus, the author and finisher of thy faith. We shall never find happiness by looking at our prayers, our doings, our feelings. It is what Jesus is, not what we are, that gives rest to the soul.

Isn't that fantastic? Don't you want that? Don't you want rest in your soul? Verse 34 finishes with this line. Christ is interceding for us at the right hand of God.

That's why no one can condemn us. That's why we can't listen to these voices, why we can just push them aside, because Christ is interceding for us. Now, what does that mean? Well, I don't think it means Christ is pleading with God.

He's not at the right hand of God, praying to God, going, come on, come on, you've got to save this guy. He's such a great guy. Give him a chance. No, I don't think that's what's happening. It's his presence.

His presence is the intervention. Jesus' presence with God says this. The law demanded payment. I paid it. And now I am here as a testimony to that.

[14 : 44] As Christ stays in heaven, as he's with his Father, he is this constant reminder, this pillar that says, I've paid the price.

My work, it's good enough. So, folks, whatever's overwhelming your conscience, Jesus says you're acquitted. Moving on, verse 35.

So guilt cannot separate us from the love of God. Those voices cannot separate us from the love of God. But what about the pain of life? Commit, separate us from God's love. Distress, famine, danger, sword, those are the things it mentions.

So Paul names these things that have historically threatened believers and caused them to wonder, is God on my side? Has God abandoned me? And the answer is no. In fact, with regards to these very difficult things that life throws at us, it says this very sort of enigmatic sort of statement.

It says, we are more than conquerors through him who loves us. That's verse 37. We are more than conquerors through him who loves us.

[15 : 45] What does that mean? It's been used often as this kind of empty triumphalism. You know, we are more than conquerors. I can run a sub 10 second 100 meters.

We are more than conquerors. I can do whatever, get this amazing job. It's not what it's talking about. But the more than conquerors, that little phrase is one word in Greek, and the word is, well, conquerors is Nike as in the shoes.

It means victory. And the first part of the Greek word is hyper, so like extreme or huge. So it's hyper Nike. So it's hyper victory. Hyper victory.

So again, what does that mean? I'm sure you know this. We're more than conquerors. It doesn't mean that our problems go away. We can't just sort of go snap our fingers and say a quick prayer and all our problems disappear, you know.

It doesn't mean pain vanishes. Hyper conquer means these things end up serving us.

[16 : 49] Okay, so an army goes into a town and there's soldiers in this town. The army goes in and it kills all the soldiers, takes over the town. Okay, that's a conquering. I mean, it's brutal, right?

It's a terrible example. It's brutal, but it's a conquering. A hyper conquering is they go into town and they overwhelm that town so much that all the soldiers, everyone just puts their guns down and moves towns and moves into the homes of all the soldiers that invaded it and says, I'll be your slave forever and I'll serve you and I'll make your life better.

That's hyper conquer. So how does it relate to this passage? It means that the tough things in life, these very painful, difficult things, not only do they not separate us from God, but God uses them.

God uses them in our life. The Bible says that God works all things out for good. And that's a tough thing to hear, right? We might not see that good worked out in our life for a very long time.

And it might not be this side of eternity that we can look back and sort of go, okay, I understand why these things happened. But we trust that God knows what he's doing and he allows these very difficult things in our life to happen because in his God's economy, all things work out for good.

[18 : 08] Okay, the passage finishes with a crescendo, which I'll finish with. I won't explain it. I think it would do it an injustice. Well, let me read it to you. Verse 38 and 39.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's just awesome, isn't it? Nothing now, nothing future, nothing on the earth, nothing in the heavenlies, the most terrifying things you can think of. Nothing separates us from the love of God because it's his grip on us, not our grip on him that matters.

I'll finish here. We want to live joyful Christian lives, free from salvific insecurity. We look to Christ. Because on the cross, Christ said, It is finished.

It is finished. I've paid the price. There is nothing else to be done. So our Christian joy and our peace that we all want stems from this one great security.

[19 : 10] Because of Christ's work alone, we are saved. God has a hold of us. He's not letting go. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. God bless you. Amen.