

Karl Barth

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Good morning. Thank you for having me with you. Let's take a moment to pray. I've passed out a prayer written by Karl Barth.

I will, I'll pray the parts that are not in bold, and if we all together could then pray the paragraphs that are in bold, allowed. I'll give us a moment just to familiarize ourselves with the prayer.

Let's pray.

O sovereign God, through Jesus Christ your Son, you have humbled yourself in order to exalt us. You became poor to make us rich. You suffered and died.

And in so doing gave us freedom and life. And this eternal mercy and goodness displays your might and majesty as our creator and Lord.

[1 : 10] The glory in which we praise you, and in the light of which we may live all the days you give to us. For this we thank you. And in thanking you, we can come to you aright.

We are able to spread out before you all to our understanding. Have mercy on our church on earth, and in its division and dispersion, in its weakness and its error.

Have mercy on the old and the young, on unbelievers far and near, on the godless and the idolaters who have not, or have not yet heard your name in truth.

Have mercy on the people of this earth, on their perplexity as they search for peace and righteousness, and also on the confusion of human endeavors, in science, nurture, and education, and on all the difficulties in so many marriages and families.

Lord, have mercy on the countless persons who today suffer starvation, the many who are persecuted and homeless, the sick in body and soul here and in other places, the lonely, prisoners, and all those who suffer punishment at the hands of others.

[2 : 46] Have mercy on us all in the hour of trial and the hour of death. Lord, because we believe with certainty that you have overcome, and that with you we too have already overcome, we call upon you now.

Show us but the first step of the road to freedom, one at such cost. Amen. And God, we do invite you here with us this morning.

We know that you already are with us, have been, and will be with us. Lord, may the reflections of our hearts this hour, our conversation together, about our friend and our brother, Karl Barth, may it be for your glory, O God, for your kingdom, Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, it is fitting in this lecture on Karl Barth to open in prayer. One contemporary scholar has said, no other theologian of the 20th century took prayer more seriously, or developed a more extensive theology of prayer than did Barth.

I'm quite glad to be here with you all this morning, because I'm glad to be speaking about a man who I've come to love. First, we must get a couple things out of the way. Pope Pius XI called Barth the greatest theologian since St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century.

[4 : 20] The greatest theologian. Not a pope, but a friend of many of ours, Eugene Peterson, said, Barth, for me, is the theologian of the 20th century.

He gathered up, rethought, re-preached, and re-preyed our entire Christian tradition. A well-known theologian, John Webster, compared Barth to luminaries Freud and Heidegger, as well as others, saying that he decisively reorganized an entire discipline.

And Karl Barth, in his own words, let me again remind you of the donkey I referred to in connection with my epistle to the Romans.

A real donkey is mentioned in the Bible, or, more specifically, an ass. But let us call it a donkey. It was permitted to carry Jesus to Jerusalem.

This is a good Palm Sunday story, in fact. If I have done anything in this life of mine, Barth said, I have done it as a relative of the donkey that went its way, carrying an important burden.

[5 : 30] The disciples had said to its owner, the Lord has need of it. And so it seems to have pleased God to have used me at this time, just as I was, in spite of all the things, the disagreeable things, that quite rightly are and will be said about me.

Thus I was used. I just happened to be on the spot. A theology somewhat different from the current theology was apparently needed in our time. And I was permitted to be the donkey that carried this better theology for part of the way, or tried to carry it as best I could.

My goal this morning is twofold. One, quite admittedly, I want to entice you to read something more from Karl Barth.

There it is. All the recommendations during our Q&A.; Secondly, I want to give you Karl Barth the man, so that the next time that you hear his name referenced, maybe in a few months, maybe in a couple years, there might be a story that we talk about this morning that comes to your mind when you hear Barth's name.

And along the way, specifically in a case study towards the end, we will get to hear Karl Barth on the gospel, specifically in his last pulpit in his local prison in Switzerland.

[7 : 01] In many places this morning, I'm going to be using the authoritative biography on Barth, written by Eberhard Bush, but we'll also be drawing from many other sources.

And to present his life, the way that I've chosen to organize this lecture, is through selecting six items, one for each decade or so of his life, give or take, that we can then see his life through.

The first of all, first object being the newspaper. So let's begin. The newspaper. This is Barth's son, Marcus.

I did not hear it directly from my grandmother, but I have it from an otherwise reliable source, that the newborn baby, Karl Barth, asked immediately for the evening paper of May 10, 1886.

Barth loved the world from the beginning. Born in Basel, Switzerland, to Father Fritz Barth, a scholar of church history and New Testament, and Mother Anna Barth, Barth came from a long line of ministers.

[8 : 10] For Barth, Jesus Christ, Scripture, and the church had much to say to our world. He is often quoted as having advocated preaching with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Although you must, in Barth's words, interpret newspapers from your Bible. Now, I must say, this might not only be the Vancouver Sun or the Globe and Mail, but maybe the economist as well.

Barth certainly stayed current on current events throughout his lifetime and, in many ways, was a little child with his wonder at our world. In many ways, this was because Jesus Christ loves the world to the point of dying for us all that Barth similarly loved the world.

We will also, in this lecture, see his embrace of the world through his walking stick, through his pipe, and through his Mozart records. Son Christoph Barth reflected on his father's life, saying, you can hardly imagine how secular this giant theologian actually was.

He loved the world in spite of all its obvious misery. He read his newspaper daily and no less carefully than his Bible. He devoured classical literature, historic works, and biographies, as well as fiction and crime stories until late in the night.

[9 : 36] I would add here, he quite enjoyed Dorothy Sayers and her stories. Again, Christoph, he enjoyed traveling, watching people as they live, meeting old, and making new friends.

Paradoxically, he only once left Europe. This was his visit to the United States in 1962. He never drove a car and never owned a TV set. Karl Barth loved the world and he loved people.

So we think of the newspaper. We think next of a church bell. Barth's first long-term job after his training, his academic training, in Bern, Berlin, Tübingen, Marburg, his first long-term job was a pastorate in Switzerland in Saffinwil.

He held this pastorate from 1911 to 1919 and it was here that he learned the day-in, day-out work of studying, preaching, praying, teaching, and learning amidst the congregation.

In fact, Saffinwil was a town of workers and he was heavily influenced this time by socialism, in fact. And some called him the quote-unquote red pastor, some of which would be later moderated, but you can see that strain throughout his thinking.

[10 : 57] What was also forged through this hard work of weekly preaching, study, and exegesis, was a bombshell. In 1919, Barth published a commentary on Romans and one theologian

appropriately called it a bombshell on the theologian's playground.

The background, in many ways, was one of liberal theology. And what Barth found was that theology had been captive to these liberal theologians who used humanity as a starting point for their reflection.

It was these very theologians that Barth had done his academic studies with. But as Barth studied Romans and as he did his work in the congregation, he discovered God to be wholly other from the world.

God himself needed to reveal himself, which he did in Jesus Christ. About Romans and the commentary that was published in 1919, Barth later said, As I look back upon my course, I seem to myself as one who, ascending the dark staircase of a church tower and trying to steady himself, reached for the banister but instead got hold of the bell rope.

To his horror, he had then to listen to what the great bell had sounded over him and not over him alone. It was this Romans commentary, revised and republished to an even wider audience in 1922, that moved Barth onto a new trajectory to academic work as a theologian.

[12 : 38] He began at Göttingen, then Munster, then Bonn. The church bell is also important in reflecting Barth's heart for the church.

His magnum opus that you referenced, Joseph, the dogmatics, is called the church dogmatics. Barth was an ecclesial thinker. He was not one to hide in ethereal ideas of the invisible church taken too far, although he definitely granted the invisible church.

He instead really did prefer to speak of the visible church. He said that, as we confess, I believe in the church. He said that this means that I believe in the congregation to which I belong, in which I have been called to faith and am responsible for my faith, in which I have my service, that this church is the one holy, universal church.

If I do not believe it here in this congregation, I do not believe it at all. No lack of beauty, no wrinkles and spots in this congregation may lead me astray.

The thing involved here is truly an article of faith. So as ones here who are gathered to hear the word and break bread and drink wine together each week, this may resonate with us.

[13 : 58] In fact, Dr. Packer has encouraged us to regain churchliness as evangelicals, and I find Barth helpful here. The church, still speaking about the church bell, is also where Barth met his wife, Nellie.

She was actually a confirmation student of his, an age difference of about seven years, and was a very talented violin player. They were engaged following her 18th birthday and married for 55 years until Carl died in 1968.

They had five children together, Franziska, Marcus, Christoph, Matthias, and Hans Jacob. You may have heard Marcus Barth's name as a New Testament scholar in his own right.

In a moment, we will need to return to this marriage as there is much sadness here, unfortunately. But we will revisit this. For Barth, confessing the one holy Catholic apostolic church meant seeing the unity of the whole church, including the Catholic church.

Barth said a strong no on a number of things to the Catholic church throughout his lifetime. And yet, he listened to the church fathers, to Augustine, to Anselm, and to Aquinas, who Pope Pius XI compared him to.

[15 : 15] One near contemporary of Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, the Catholic theologian, wrote an authoritative work on Barth that is actually still in use today. And Catholic theologian Hong Kong similarly studied Barth.

Through these studies and dialogue with the Catholics, Barth actually affected significantly the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. And toward the end of his life, Barth, frequently on the radio, would listen to Catholic sermons right after the Protestant sermon.

Barth, towards the end of his life, also commented increasingly on the importance of the Lord's Supper, encouraging us to celebrate it weekly. Word and sacrament help together.

So we think of the church bell with Barth's beginnings as a pastor and his lifelong love and work for the church. Following the church bell, moving from this object to art, we think of Barth's favorite paintings.

Does anyone know off the top of their head what that would be? Seeing no answers, hearing no answers. Barth's favorite painting was Crucifixion Scene, painted by Matthias Grunewald.

[16:35] It hung above his writing desk for 50 years. And actually, Regent College has a copy made by another artist of this piece on the second floor if you ever get to come by and take a look at this.

It was called the Eisenheim Altarpiece, a triptych depicting the death of Jesus Christ, as I mentioned, on the cross. On the left of the painting, we see his disciples huddled together. On the right, and this is most often what Barth references regarding the painting, we see John the Baptist pointing to Jesus Christ. John looks directly at us as the viewers, truly drawing us in to the painting.

And John, with his slightly enlarged index finger, points directly to the Lord on the cross. This is what captured Barth's mind and imagination.

He saw John the Baptist as the premier witness to Jesus Christ. And this is what Barth called himself a witness. Like John the Baptist, we all witness to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

[17:44] In fact, late in his life, Barth would say, the last word which I have to say as a theologian and also a politician is not a term like grace, but a name, Jesus Christ.

He is grace. He is the last. Beyond the world and the church and even beyond theology. What I have been concerned to do in my long life has been increasingly to emphasize this name and to say there is no salvation in any other name than this.

for grace too is there. Through and through, Barth was a Christocentric thinker. He was a witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two smaller paintings also heard, actually I'm not sure on paintings, I'm going to say portraits. Two smaller portraits hung in Barth's study. And again, does anybody have a guess?

One was a Reformation era theologian and one was a well-known composer. Any guesses? Mozart. Mozart.

[18:54] That's one. Anybody on the Reformation era theologian? Martin Luther. Close. Quite close. I heard it.

Calvin? Yes. Calvin and Mozart. Now, Barth was quite careful. These portraits were hung at exactly the same height. He emphasized this. Exactly the same height.

No preference was allowed between the two. Although, admittedly, if he had to choose between the two, I suspect his preference would have been Mozart. Regarding Calvin, at the University of Göttingen, which was Barth's first academic post, he was appointed professor of Reformed theology.

Now, Barth had been preaching in Saffron Wheel every week, but he had to study extensively to get up to speed on Reformed theology. And believe me, again, going back to the church dogmatics and the magnum opus, 14 volumes, he certainly did get up to speed on Reformed theology and theology overall.

Throughout, Barth's affinity for Calvin was significant. In his words, Calvin is a cataract, a primeval forest, something directly down from Himalaya, absolutely Chinese, strange, mythological.

[20:16] I lack completely the means, the suction cups, even to assimilate this phenomenon, not to speak of presenting it adequately. What I receive from Calvin is only a thin little stream, and what I can then give out again is only yet a thinner extract of this little stream.

I could gladly and profitably set myself down and spend all the rest of my life just with Calvin. This is in the 1920s. To a friend.

Now, with Dr. Packer here, I probably don't have to ask this, but has everybody read at least a portion of Calvin's Institutes? At least a portion. Even?

Even better. Even better. In Calvin, we find another brother in the faith, a first-rate thinker, a pious mind, and a heart for the church.

Over the course of his life, Bart would increasingly be, in some ways, critical of Calvin on certain points. But throughout, he remained a constant dialogue partner for Barth.

[21:24] Bart said late in his life, it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that, notwithstanding all the necessary criticisms and corrections, there is hardly a better teacher, apart from the biblical prophets and apostles, than Calvin.

just while we're on this theme, I want to mention another friend of Calvin who's actually coming to Regent in May to visit, author Marilyn Robinson, the author of Gilead and Home.

I don't know if anybody else has already bought their tickets, but Saturday evening, May 3rd, Marilyn Robinson, if there's any other fans here, will be speaking, and she'll be speaking on

Bonhoeffer Saturday evening, May 3rd.

Get your tickets, though, as they might sell out, just to encourage everyone. Now, Bart followed Luther in some areas as well, but not to the same degree as his constant dialogue partner, Calvin. All this to say, with Calvin's portrait on the wall, we can think of Bart's affinity for Reformed theology and his engagement with it. And we'll get back to Mozart, the equal portrait on the wall, in a few moments.

[22 : 35] For Bart, the Reformation recovered vibrant aspects of the gospel. That gospel, Jesus Christ, well depicted in the Eisenheim altarpiece, this crucifixion art, which is our third object.

Now, from there, we move to the simple, everyday walking stick. Bart's work had continued to increase throughout the 1920s into the 1930s, as he moved from Göttingen to Münster and then Bonn.

His dogmatics, his life project, really began in earnest during this time. And, vacations were thus important to him. On vacations, he would take no theology, but instead his pipe, which we'll come to, and he would enjoy long conversations with his friends.

The walking stick can also symbolize his move from Germany. Bart was pivotal in crafting the 1934 Barman Declaration for the confessing church, and in 1935, ended up being expelled from Germany.

He had to leave his post at Bonn and was out of work for three days, Friday to a Monday. The University of Basel, his hometown, quickly offered him a position.

[23 : 50] Again, this is 1935. He was there for the rest of his academic life. He stayed connected to the German church, and here it is worth mentioning a friend and a younger colleague at this. Any guesses as to who I might be mentioning here?

Bonhoeffer. I heard it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer looked up immensely to Bart, although he would diverge from Bart's thinking to some degree. After meeting Bart personally, Bonhoeffer would write, Bart in person is even better than his books.

And Bart's respect for his younger colleague Bonhoeffer was similarly immense. In the Dogmatics, he cited Cost of Discipleship, Bonhoeffer's amazing work, and he cited it quite approvingly.

He also wrote to Bonhoeffer multiple times during the Confessing Church conflict in Germany, and they did actually see each other in person in Switzerland. in the 1940s.

But with the walking stick and his move from Germany to Switzerland, and we think of the walking stick with his vacations and his frequent afternoon walks, we must also turn to a disappointment of mine and some others, many others, in Bart.

[25 : 08] One of Bart's frequent walking companions was his assistant, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, known as Lolo. The best scholarship does not see this relationship as sexual, most likely, but there was likely romantic attraction at some point in the 1920s, when Bart had already been married for a few years.

Lolo first attended a lecture by Bart in 1924. She became his assistant and then moved in with the Bart family in 1929.

There's a deep sorrow here in many ways. She was never married and was an incredibly valuable assistant and theologian in her own right.

She was a member of the family known as Auntie Lolo, especially to Bart and his wife's children. And as I think about it, I've actually been reflecting on this in the past couple days, I just have to admit sorrow on this.

The result of her presence in Bart's life and his wife Nellie's life was in his biographer's words, a deep burden which caused them unspeakably deep suffering.

[26 : 28] Tensions arose which shook them to the core. Bart himself did not hesitate to take the responsibility and the blame for the situation which had come about. another biographer said, as witnesses of this unusual life, it gradually became clear to us that in all the disruption and conflict among them, these three, there were also moments of relaxation, of mutual friendship, and above all that each of the three remained true to self and to the two others and that all this was, in an exemplary way, suffered, but also truly experienced in all clarity and wisdom.

That at the end of Carl's life, Nellie, his wife, had again become the one closest to him, was then and is now deeply moving to us. Lolo, Bart's assistant, would, in the 1960s, come down with a severe mental illness.

I mean, excuse me, a severe brain illness. That's a complete misspeak there. severe brain illness. And she was in nursing care for the rest of her life. Most Sundays, Bart would visit her in nursing care.

They really never concealed from anyone, this is another scholar writing, never concealed from anyone or played down their extremely vulnerable relationship. And another scholar, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, was indispensable to Bart.

He could not have been what he was or have done what he did without her. And that's just one opinion. But, multiple scholars would say that. At the end of the day, there is sorrow.

[28 : 10] It's not a situation I would wish on anybody, nor would I want my daughter or my wife to be in. Along with the walking stick, we should see Bart's ever-present pipe.

Ever-present. He actually joked that it was barely taken out of his hands in the hospital. With his pipe, he loved friendships, beginning with his longtime friend, Edward Ternes, a late-in-life friendship in letters with Carl Zuckmeyer, and a reconciled friendship with Emil Bruner, the theologian, at the very end of Bruner's life.

Bart's life as a professor and theologian with his pipe was one of seminars, lectures, dialogue groups, honorary doctorates, even after he retired in 1962.

The pipe was a constant companion. He loved good conversations. He commented, my thinking, writing, and speaking developed from reacting to people, reacting to their events and circumstances with which I was involved, with their questions and their riddles.

He loved good conversation. He loved jokes and was, in fact, a very humorous man. I need to comment here, or I need to reference his summing up of his dogmatics, again, this 14-volume magnum opus of his life.

[29 : 41] And this is towards the end of his life that he was reflecting on his dogmatics, and he would say, the angels laugh at old Carl. They laugh at him because he tries to grasp the truth about God in a book of dogmatics.

They laugh at the fact that volume follows volume, and each is thicker than the previous one. As the angels laugh, they say to one another, look, here he comes now with his little push cart full of volumes of the dogmatics.

And the angels laugh about the men who write so much about Carl Barth instead of writing about the things he is trying to write about. Truly, the angels laugh. And hearing this in a few moments, we'll turn to the things that he is writing about.

And finally, we turn to Mozart as part of his biography here before turning to our case study. Every day, Barth began by listening to Mozart. Most evenings, in fact, he ended his days listening to Mozart.

Barth said, upon arriving in heaven, he would first seek out Mozart, and only then would he find others. Barth admitted that perhaps when the angels go about their task of praising God, maybe they play only Bach.

[31 : 04] But he was certain when the angels are together as a family, they play Mozart. And that then, too, our dear Lord listens with special pleasure.

interestingly, Barth heard his theology, his own theology, the yes of God in Jesus Christ, overtaking the lesser no in Mozart's music.

He said, the Mozartian center is not like that of the great theologian Schleiermacher, a matter of balance, neutrality, and finally indifference.

What occurs in Mozart is rather a glorious upsetting of the balance, a turning in which the light rises and the shadows fall, though without disappearing, in which joy overtakes sorrow without extinguishing it, in which the yea rings louder than the ever-present nay.

And again, in the second part of this lecture, we'll see the nay, we'll hear the nay being drowned out by the louder yea. And again, Barth, in a newspaper article, speaking directly to Mozart.

[32 : 26] What I thank you for is simply this. Whenever I listen to you, I am transported to the threshold of a world which in sunlight and storm, by day and by night, is a good and ordered world.

Then, as a human being of the 20th century, I always find myself blessed with courage, not arrogance, with tempo, not an exaggerated tempo, with purity, not a wearisome purity, with peace, not a slothful peace.

With an ear open to your musical dialectic, one can be young and become old, can work and rest, be content and sad.

In short, one can live. Mozart was a daily companion to Barth in his home. life. As Barth's health failed, and as Charlotte von Kirschbaum was in the nursing facility, Barth and his wife Nellie entered golden years of life together, a reconciliation.

Barth himself spoke of a really harmonious evening of his life. From 1964 onward, his health became troublesome. He had done quite well on his trip in 1962 to the United States.

[33 : 49] But in 1964 onward, this is when his health began to fail, and he actually at that point would stop preaching in the local prison that we'll be looking at. his biographer said, after his death, my wife, this is his biographer, Bush speaking, after his death, my wife said to me, he was a little bit like an angel in his last weeks.

I could also say he was like a child. He really returned a bit to his youth and very often sang the simple songs he learned in Sunday school. This, in fact, fits with his answer to a seminary student who once asked him what the most momentous discovery of his long theological life had been. Bart's answer? Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. And again, his biographer Bush.

The last evening, two days before he died, I was with my wife in his house, and I think in these last times, Bart feared the night. Therefore, he didn't want us to leave his house.

At one o'clock, we said we'd like to go home. This is his biography for Bush and his wife, because we had a one-hour walk, 1.15 in the morning. So Bart said to go when we wanted to, but that he would go to his bed, and that we should come and sing songs.

[35 : 16] It was 1.15 a.m., and his windows were opened, facing onto the street. I said, we'll have to close the windows, because other people will be awakened by our song. Bart said, oh, it doesn't matter, it will be a good song.

And first he began with his children's songs, then he said to take a church hymn book, and we would sing an Advent song. This is in December 1968. We would sing an Advent song.

Now when Bart sang, he didn't like to whisper. He sang very loudly, like a lion. And I think many houses that evening could hear his great song. Then we sang an Advent song that spoke of the great comfort that Christ is coming with his joy.

And that was the last time I saw Carl Bart. Bart's final words the next evening, again in December 1968, were written with, as usual, Mozart on the record player.

He was found in his chair the next morning. The piece he was working on broke off mid-sentence. He had received two phone calls that evening, one with his old childhood friend, Edward Ternason, who he spoke with every day.

[36 : 32] He told Edward, towards the end of the conversation, but keep your chin up. Never mind. He will reign. Emphasized in the closing paragraphs of the piece that Bart was working on, were these beautiful words of Jesus, speaking in Mark 12, on the resurrection.

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And with these Easter words, our review of Bart's biography is finished, and in a moment, we'll turn to a brief case study.

But first, looking back, a newspaper, a church bell, the Eisenheim crucifixion painting, a walking stick, his pipe, his beloved pipe, and Mozart on the record player, the life of our friend, Karl Bart.

And as we turn to our brief case study, we've been sitting for a few moments, so let's take a 60-second break, feel free to stand up, stretch, reconnect with our bodies, and I will reconvene us in 60 seconds.

Thank you.

[38 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

And he had a book and he said he was a minister and he was a minister.

Could be true in some way. And was this a bell or a cat? Well, let me clarify that real quick. Yeah, let me clarify that in the Q&A.;

Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[39 : 51] So, Karl Barth has ended up in prison. So wrote one friend of Barth's to another in late 1954.

Now, unlike Bonhoeffer, this was completely optional on Barth's part. In 1954, Barth began preaching in his local prison in Basel a few times each year.

The prison was in downtown Basel, just a kilometer from his house at the time. Although, shortly thereafter, he did move a few kilometers further away. The prison was also quite near his university.

The Reformed chaplain, Martin Schwartz, had invited him to preach. And over 10 years, from 1954 to 1964, Barth preached 28 sermons inside the prison.

Barth celebrated many special holidays, in fact, there with the prisoners. Easter's, Christmases, and, three years in a row, New Year's Eve. To put it simply, this became a very special community for Barth.

[40 : 58] Truly, it was his final pulpit during the last decade of his life. After preaching his first sermon there, he wrote, everything was somehow much more real than in an ordinary church, with the usual kind of Christians that are assembled there.

Later, he wrote, it is very evident there that people need firm contact with real life. At the same time, the gospel becomes remarkably relevant and natural of its own accord.

A couple years into his preaching there, Barth quipped in a magazine article, I should mention that the local prison, the local prison chapel, has become my favorite pulpit in these past years.

There are but few theology professors whose sermon listener one can become only after having committed a serious violation of the civil order. The reformed chaplain, Chaplain Schwartz, mentioned how the prisoners loved Barth, and clearly the feeling was mutual.

Barth mentioned receiving for one of his birthdays a bundle of moving letters from the prison inmates that were written in response to his sermons there, a bundle of letters, a particularly cherished gift.

[42 : 15] He treasured his relationships with these men. His biographer, again, Eberhard Bush, writes, Barth did not want merely to preach to his audience. In order to preach to them properly, excuse me, in order to preach to them properly, he also wanted to get to know them personally, and so he often went to visit them in their cells.

We see Barth's humility here. He said to them in one sermon, let me tell you quite frankly, we are all together great sinners.

Please understand me. I include myself. I stand ready to confess being the greatest sinner among you all. Yet you may then not exclude yourself from the group.

Let's jump right into his sermons. Now at the time, Barth had been working on volume four of his dogmatics. Volume four is on the doctrine of reconciliation, and this would be the final volume in the dogmatics.

Barth's mature thought on the gospel, reconciliation, and above all, Jesus Christ, is clearly seen in these sermons. We see this even through the sermon titles.

[43 : 34] You will live also, saved by grace, death, but life. Chaplain Schwartz writes, through these sermons, the strangers within the gate found themselves challenged by the gospel, understood in their guilt and need, comforted, and strengthened in their struggle.

As we are entering Holy Week, I've selected excerpts from three sermons. one Good Friday sermon and two Easter sermons for us. First, the criminals with him.

Speaking on Luke 23, 33, they crucified Jesus with the criminals. Crucified Jesus with the criminals, one on either side of him.

And here, Barth says, it so happened that in this man, Jesus, God himself came into the world, which he had created and against all odds still loved.

He took human nature upon himself and became man like the rest of us in order to put an end to the world's fight against him and also against itself and to replace man's disorder by God's design.

[44 : 59] In Jesus, God hallowed his name, made his kingdom come, his will done on earth as it is in heaven, as we say in the Lord's Prayer.

It happened through this man on the cross that God canceled out and swept away all our human wickedness, our pride, our anxiety, our greeds and our false pretenses, whereby we had continually offended him and made life difficult, if not impossible, for ourselves and for others.

He crossed out what had made our life fundamentally terrifying, dark and distressing, the life of health and of sickness, of happiness and of unhappiness, of the high-born and of the low-born, of the rich and of the poor, of the free and of the captive.

Jesus did away with it. It is no longer part of us. It is behind us. In Jesus, God made the day break after the long night and spring come after the long winter.

All these things happened in that one man. In Jesus, God took upon himself the full load of evil. He made our wickedness his own. He gave himself and his dear son to be defamed as a criminal, to be accursed, condemned, delivered from life unto death as though he himself, the holy God, had done

all the evil we human beings did and do.

[46 : 35] In giving himself in Jesus Christ, he reconciled the world unto himself. He saved us and made us free to live in his everlasting kingdom. It's fascinating thinking of the prison context, the prison walls where this sermon was preached.

Barth said in another sermon, my sin, my captivity, my suffering are yesterday's reality, not today's. They are things of my past, not of the present, nor of the future.

I have been saved. Is this really so? Is this the truth? Look once again to Jesus Christ in his death upon the cross. He carried our sin, our captivity, and our suffering and did not carry it in vain.

He carried it away. Accordingly, sin is not the primary theme of Barth's sermons in the prison.

However sensational, the sin that led the criminals to prison is not the most important reality about them.

Instead, the most important reality is the work and person of Jesus Christ. And it's his gospel that Barth brings and fosters and facilitates inside the prison.

[47 : 53] Barth elaborated, the task of making the gospel shine forth is more urgent than that of making the seriousness visible. Anyone to whom this positive task of the gospel is not absolutely the chief task, anyone who might be inclined to shout at, disconcert, or laugh at men above all for their foolishness and wickedness had instead better be silent.

The gospel applies to all people. simply, it can be understood in the words of Luke 15 regarding Jesus. This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.

Or in the comfortable words of Paul that we hear in the 730 service each Sunday, 1 Timothy 1.15, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

How is this possible? Only through the work of Jesus Christ. Again, Barth, we have to regard each human being, even the oddest, most infamous, or wretched, from the point of view that on the basis of the eternal decision of God, Jesus Christ is also his brother.

God himself is also his father. On that assumption, we have to associate with him. Now, if that is already known to him, we have to strengthen him in it.

[49 : 22] If he does not yet know it or knows it no longer, it is our job to impart this knowledge to him. And that's what we see Barth doing in his prison sermons.

Easter Sunday, 1959, he preached death, but life on Romans 6.23. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Barth says, what is death? The wages paid by sin? Not only shall we die one day, death is much greater and much more dangerous than that.

It is the great no, the shadow that hangs over our human life and accompanies all its movements. It is the judgment which reads, you, your life, or what you think is life, has no meaning because it has no right to exist and therefore cannot last.

This is Barth speaking about the old life, pre-believing. Your life is a rejected life. It has no value before God or before your fellow being, not even before yourself.

[50 : 37] Death means that this no has been pronounced over us. And as Romans 6 says, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And Barth says, eternal life was the destination of Christ's journey. It is the destination of our journey as well since the Easter story happened for us. No backing out, dear brothers and sisters. No return to a life where we once again would labor in the service of sin, of our evil defiance, only to earn and to receive death as the wages of sin. No, forward, into life eternal.

Eternal life is man's life when God has spoken his yes upon it. Once and for all, unconditionally and unreservedly, not to be changed anymore.

Eternal life is man's life lived with God in his bright light, nourished and sustained by his own life.

Eternal life is man's life committed to the service of God and thereby to the service of neighbor.

[51 : 45] A life which certainly also serves him best who is allowed to live it. Eternal life is a strong, no longer a weak life. It is joyous and no longer sad, true and no longer deceitful.

Eternal life is man's indestructible life because it comes from God and is sustained by him. So, granted all this, Bart asks, what remains for us what remains for us to be done?

For us, only one thing, to perceive, to accept and to take to heart that this is so, eternal life has come.

God's free gift is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you know whom we would resemble were we not to perceive and accept this truth? We would resemble a fool who is likely to say these days, spring is not here yet, the cherry trees are not yet fully in bloom.

It is still raining. The cold, this is clearly not true today. This is Bart. It is still raining. The cold weather prevails and who knows, there may even be some more snow. Would such not be the words of a fool?

[53 : 06] Again, Bart, I could even use a more striking illustration. Did you read in the paper recently that two Japanese soldiers were found in the Philippines who had not yet heard or did not believe that the war had ended 14 years ago?

They continue to hide in some jungle and shoot at everybody who dares approach them. Strange people, aren't they? Well, we are such people when we refuse to perceive and to hold true what the Easter message declares to be the meaning of the Easter story.

Sin and death are conquered. God's free gift prevails. His gift of eternal life for us all. Shall we not very humbly pay heed to this message? Death, but life.

So this is the gospel. And for Bart, he was called to share this in his local prison there in Basel.

Some of us might also be called to share the gospel in prison.

To work for fair sentencing laws. To volunteer with prison fellowships angel tree, as I know some of us do. For prison reform, to work for prison reform. To work against prison rape.

[54 : 17] Or to visit those in prison. Actually, I would venture many of us are called to this. First of all, in prayer. And I hope that if you have stories along these lines you might share some in our Q&A; in just a couple moments.

Bart himself developed quite a heart for prisoners and for the penal system. During his 1962 trip to the states that we've mentioned, he specifically visited prisons in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York.

And praised Rikers Island, the prison there, Rikers Island's Anna Cross, who was doing notable reforming work. Bart wrote to Chaplain Schwartz back in Basel, All in all, our prison is better than what I've seen here in the states so far.

The prisoners in San Francisco, mostly blacks, to whom I spoke, send greeting to ours. They sang well and lustily for me. And upon returning to Basel after his 1962 trip here to the states seven weeks, Bart gave a special report on his travels to the prisoners in Basel, which is special to me thinking of that.

Others of us will be called to share the gospel elsewhere, and already do. In our neighborhoods, in the lower east side, in our suburban coffee shops, in our clubs, and all our relationships.

[55 : 41] As the church, we are to share the gospel, inviting others into our community to forsake our old dead lives, which Bart has talked about so well, and to enter into the true life, the living life, the triune life of God.

Bart's final sermon in the prison was Easter, 1964. As far as we know, this was actually his last sermon. His health went downhill in those final four years after that. And he, throughout 1965, longed to return to the prison to preach, but was unable to do so.

He spoke on John 20, which is quite fitting. John 20, where, after Jesus had died, and the disciples were gathered together in the locked room for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, in fact, and said to them, Peace be with you.

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side, and the disciples became glad when they saw the Lord. John 20. And this gladness, this joy, I think, as Bart's last sermon, as far as we know, in his life, is quite fitting.

He was a joyful man in many ways. But his joy was not simply because of the goodness of the world, his walking stick, his beloved pipe, his family, or even listening to Mozart.

[57 : 13] His joy was because in Jesus Christ, in Jesus Christ, reconciliation has come. The kingdom has begun. Bringing together the rich and the poor as James has taught us these past months.

Bringing together the prisoners with those of us outside the prison walls. How Bart loved these men and how they loved him as well. let's conclude with the closing words of his final sermon here.

Again on John 20. Without seeing the Lord, nobody can be glad. Whoever sees him will become glad. Why should this not happen here to us as well?

To the little Easter congregation of prisoners in Basel's Spittlestrass? That was the street of the prison. In Basel's Spittlestrass with their chaplain and their organist. With all the inmates and warders of this institution and, after all, I suppose I belong here too. With the old professor who occasionally pays a visit here.
[58 : 18] All of us can see the Lord too. And so all of us may become glad too. God grant that this may happen to us. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. music applause applause applause applause
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