

He Fills the Gap

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[0 : 00] What has Jesus done? Why is his death so significant?

Why is it that Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11 that we need to proclaim his death until he comes, as we do it in this way in the Lord's Supper?

How are we to know? However, the only place we can turn is God's word, the Bible. When it comes to a question like this, I certainly find it, I have found it in this occasion, very hard to select a text.

I would go to one place and reflect on what it said about the Lord's death, and it took me somewhere else, and then somewhere else again, and through the whole word.

The whole Bible flows into this question. You start in one place, and it leads you to another without stopping. So I turn this morning to Isaiah 59, and see what guidance we're given here in understanding this coming of the Lord Jesus and his death, to be reminded of what the Lord has been doing, dealing with us, with men, and being pointed forward as we look on the Lord Jesus.

[1 : 40] And from Isaiah 59, I read the words in verse 16, He that is the Lord who has been looking on the scene that we read, and he saw in verse 16 that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede.

Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. And I put it to you today that we see here, we find that the Lord looks for a man, and has done through the centuries, but he gives a savior.

Just these two things. The Lord looks for a man. The Lord saw it. He was watching, he was looking, and he saw that there was no man for justice.

He wondered that there was no one to intercede or intervene. And it's poetry, so it's abbreviated. It's to intercede for his people, the sinning people.

That's a frightening thing, isn't it? Doesn't it frighten you? That there was a time when the Lord looked on the nation.

[3 : 03] He looked on the generations of man. And the Lord looks very closely. He knows each of our hearts. And he found no one to stand for his people, to pray for the people.

In Ezekiel, there was something very similar. I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it.

But I found no one. And Jeremiah, go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.

If you know your Bible, does that remind you of someone? Go search if you can find one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth.

Remember Abraham when the Lord appeared to him, the three men, and then they set off for Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham interceded. Remember, he started with 50.

[4 : 26] If there are 50 righteous men, will you spare the city? And he persisted. And he went as far as 10. And the Lord responded to him, for the sake of 10 righteous, I will not destroy the city.

Through Jeremiah, the Lord is saying, if you find one person, one righteous man, I will forgive the city. There is a great need.

Isaiah 59 spells it out at the beginning. Not pleasant reading, was it? But it's that that separates us from God.

The Lord identifies this need. He tells us that he does not delight in the death of the wicked. He tells us in Isaiah, and also Paul picks it up in Corinthians, now is the day of salvation.

The Lord is reaching out with salvation. In Timothy, he desires all people to be saved. But for this to happen, someone, even one, must stand for the people.

[5 : 41] Someone has to do it. Will, he looks around, will any man stand for man, stand for mankind before God?

But the prophets, we've just read several of them, they show just how destitute we are on our own. How can that be possible?

No one? No man to be found? Psalm 14 tells us that there is no one righteous, not one, as you know, that in Romans, that Paul uses.

When Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah, ten? Surely you'll find ten. Abraham saw no need to go any lower than that.

Surely there'll be ten. Ten. But there weren't. We know that because Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. And doesn't it take us to, again, to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, as in Adam, all die.

[6 : 54] He looked for a man and he found no one. No one righteous. The Lord was appalled that there was no one to intervene.

But remember Abraham again in another setting. He told his promised son, God himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering.

A burnt offering was required. It was going to be the children of Abraham in his son. But Abraham had the confidence the Lord will provide.

the Lord looks for a man. It's very sobering. It must be. We must live with that. We must know that. But we must also know that therefore, when the Lord found no one, the Lord himself gives a savior. It's here in this same verse. He saw that there was no man. He wondered. He was appalled that there was no one to intervene. And then, his own arm brought him salvation and his righteousness upheld him.

[8 : 12] It continues down to verse 20. A redeemer will come to Zion to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, declares the Lord. The Lord gives a savior.

His own arm brought him salvation for these men amongst whom there were none righteous. He does provide the lamb.

He does provide the man. He provides the substitute. He enters in to human experience.

Through Isaiah, Isaiah is known for the Lord speaking of his servant and speaking to his servant. And when the servant first appears in Isaiah, it appears to be a reference to a people, to Israel as his servant.

But we find that Israel repeatedly falls away, repeatedly fails. Fewer and fewer are faithful to the Lord. And so, we come to chapter 59 when there is none to be found.

[9 : 22] that is faithful. But you know well, many of you know well, chapter 53, there is a servant and it seems to be just one.

One who takes the place of the many. He for us. The Lord provides his salvation for us.

He for us, for our griefs, for our sorrows, for our transgressions, our iniquities, our guilt. Until the end of that passage, 53, verse 11, by his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many.

the servant of the Lord comes and accomplishes what no one else can do. He brings salvation. He brings a justifying even of those that were unjust and trust in him.

And it's these things that lead us, that show us the way, that show us the empty hole in the human race that required the Lord himself to fill it.

[10 : 49] And it's this Jesus sent by God, God himself, it's God who is the savior, his own arm brought him salvation. salvation. He enters in, becomes man, that he can find a man who will intercede, who will stand in the gap against the Lord that the city will not be destroyed, that there will be forgiveness.

A man to stand on behalf of the land. Jeremiah, I mentioned a moment ago, chapter 5, verse 1, if you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.

And one is found, one is given, and so forgiveness is found for the sinner. This is the Lord anticipating, this is the Lord showing the way, showing why he has to come.

and so the Lord is therefore faithful to his own word and just to forgive us our sins.

Remember Jesus said, John 14, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[12 : 26] Why? Because he could find no one else and he gave himself. Those prophets explain to us why there is no other way, in heaven or on earth, to come to the eternal holy God.

God. But they also explain why there is a way. One way, one way that's enough, one way that is more than enough, that is adequate.

Because he has brought salvation himself. He has given to us out of his endless mercy. He went looking for a righteous man.

It shows us his longing to save us, to save many, to save the unrighteous. He went looking. He went searching.

He encourages us to search into the city. Is there just one? I will do with one. He has a great longing to have fellowship with his creation, to have compassion on us in our great frailties.

[13 : 40] When we could offer no one, he has come himself to serve, to serve us that we might serve him. He has come to give his life the ransom for many.

I mentioned a moment ago, even as in Adam all died, Paul continues, so in Christ all will be made alive.

all because there is no one else who is righteous, no one else who has life, but he has the fullness of life.

And God has given him to us. when we speak about, we call them Christian things, you know sometimes you might make a phone call, you have a question to ask someone, and they're a friend perhaps, and so they answer the phone and you ask, how are you doing, they ask, how are you doing, and you go around the houses, you cover all sorts of things.

And then you come to the sort of the conversation goes into a lull perhaps, and you say, but there was one thing especially I wanted to ask you, this is what I was calling about, among perfectly decent things, but there's one thing that matters.

[15 : 12] And it's like that with us too, there are many good things to talk about, I have nothing against them, don't misunderstand me. But Jesus himself said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

That's what the Lord is about, that's what his concern was, that's what the prophets are saying, what I need from you is righteousness. to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

What is first? What is the main thing? What matters as we deal with our God? Jesus matters. He's the only way.

He's the truth, he's the life, no one comes to the Father but by him. it's Jesus who matters. You know that, you know that from many different directions from the Bible.

I would lead you there in this way today because to me it's so vivid that if it were not for him, it hardly bears thinking about it, does it?

[16 : 31] If it were not for him. God's eternal purpose for him. We know it's eternal because he's been busy about it through the generations. Isaiah tells us that. There is one reason that Jesus has come and it is because there never was and there never will be anyone else to stand before the holy God on behalf of the land and the people.

He can find no one. He's tried every avenue to find someone. The only answer was to come himself and to become one of us and to bear our sin to become sin for us who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God but only in him.

The Lord's Supper takes us there. It takes us to the death of the Lord Jesus of all people. Why should he die that we might be made righteous?

us. We come to the Lord's table and as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim his death as my life. He and he only amongst men is the righteous one.

And there's no need and there's no gain and there's no hope in me or you looking anywhere else. It's a great, a glorious, a complete work that he's done.

[18 : 23] That's all God was looking for, one who deals honestly and he's found one and so he won't destroy the city. He's done it already.

He gave the perfect, the suitable servant to serve him, to serve you, laying down his life for you before our God, a righteous God, but a God as we sang of great immeasurable compassion and a great longing for your soul.

Rest in him as the Lord saw there was no man, but his own arm brought him salvation and a redeemer will come to Zion.

We remember the redeemer and the redemption price as we look on him laying himself before us that we might eat the bread and drink the cup, be renewed in life in his body and blood, the death of our Lord Jesus.

May he grant blessing on his word as we have spent a little time in it so far, but also as we return to it shortly further along the way.

[19 : 57] May he bless his word to us for his own namesake and our service of him. Let us pray for a moment. Lord, the extremity of the situations so rarely crosses our mind that yes, we see a world around us which is so well described even by Isaiah those many years ago.

we must confess that too often we don't see just how desperate it is or how desperate it would be if it were not for your salvation, your reaching out, your obtaining the victory by your own great and strong arm, by your great wisdom, eternal wisdom, and that eternal purpose which led to the coming of our Lord Jesus, his faultless obedience, that he should be brought to death, the lamb that was slain, but yet to rise again, that strong man who bound death, death, death, death, death, death, that it might not overcome us, but we might be found in safety through him, through his mighty, mighty work.

Lord, set him firmly before us today, we pray, as we anticipate receiving of the bread and the drink that symbolize him, his body and his blood, that we will take hold of these things, take hold of your word, that we will stand firm and strong in him, that we too would take that breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, we would walk as he walked, we would be true to him, and grant Lord, an effective working of your grace towards us today, in word and sacrament, and that your light would shine forth, that we would depart from every way that is of the spirit of the world, may we know it to be wickedness, that we cannot be friends with that spirit, and friends with our God, we thank you for his giving of his life for his friends, that we might be found in fellowship with you, may we know the blessings of it today, we pray.

Be present amongst us, cast out those things that are obstacles between us and you, that we would draw near to you, in a fullness of heart, by the gift of the Lord Jesus, and of his spirit.

[23 : 40] In him we pray, may you accept us. Amen. Let us also take a few verses to sing together.

Psalms 134, it's the Sing Psalms version, page 33, that's the closing verses of this psalm, from verse 6 to verse 9. Psalm 28, page 33, from verse 6.

Praise to the Lord, for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made, he is my strength, he is my shield, I trust in him who sends me aid.

And so then we'll sing through to the end of that psalm. Verses 6 to 9, let's stand to sing. Amen.

Praise to the Lord, to the Lord, for he has heard the plea for mercy which I made.

He is my strength, he is my shield. I trust in him who sends me aid.

[25 : 10] My heart uplifted leads for joy, my thanks to him I gladly sing, the Lord, God is his people's strength, a saving fortress for his king.

Lord, save your people, your own flock, we please your heritage to bless.

Be their good shepherd, carry them forever in your faithfulness.

Amen. We come closer to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and make some preparations for it. There are the practical preparations to come in just a moment, but also to prepare our minds and our hearts. And to touch first for a moment on the question of who should be here.

[26 : 56] Now, we have the practical arrangement where, yes, there is a division. A lot of preparation has happened already that many of you who are going to receive the Lord's Supper, you are at the table.

But to just remind ourselves briefly who can or should receive the Lord's Supper and who should not. ultimately everyone should.

That's what should be happening. Everyone is called to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should believe and take the Supper.

Everyone out there, and yes, you sitting here, not at the table, you should be taking the Lord's Supper. It's your life.

You should be trusting in the Lord Jesus, and when you do, that you share in the Supper of the Lord, his death, his body, and his blood. That's ultimately, no one should separate themselves from the Lord.

[28 : 11] But speaking about right now, these symbols of the Lord's death, his gift of his life, remember he said, greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

This supper is for his friends. And you are my friends, he goes on to say, if you do what I command you. Now, you know that you don't do everything he commands you.

I don't, regrettably. It's a great sorrow, isn't it? And you know that you fall far short, but yet, the desire of your heart, which he sees and he knows.

Your desire is that you might be strengthened to nearer and nearer keep his commandments. It's for all who have entered in to that new life by trusting in him, just in the entry at least, like a little child, but one who needs to grow and to learn the ways of the family and to live them.

You receive the word that he gives, that he is for you, and the supper is for you. It's given to refresh and to strengthen you that day by day you might draw nearer and nearer to him and follow him.

[29 : 37] It's for growth in the life of faith. That's why he gives us these particular symbols, bread and drink to give us growth.

It's for you. But if you have not yet entered, no, it is not for you then. Don't take it if you have not yet entered.

It means that it would only be a form without the faith. That is what Paul means with not discerning the Lord's body, not understanding what it is.

You're not yet clinging on to what Jesus has done for you. But I said it a moment ago, you should be, you need it, like nothing else on earth.

He is the way, the truth and the life. That's what you need. You should be coming soon. So let us examine ourselves.

[30 : 46] Do you trust in him, even a little, with a little understanding, but some? Then this is for you to nourish and to bring that to growth and to fruit, to nurture you.

It is for you, you. But if you do not know that faith, if you're not certain of it, can I urge you, don't delay, make certain of it.

I urge you, what else is there? If you don't have this, what else is there of any worth? And you know that, you've heard that, but deal with it.

Not just hearing the truth, but responding to it. There are some that the table is not for yet, but therefore let us come, those who do believe, trust in the Lord Jesus, for your life, for your hope, come to him today.

We will come to the table, and in preparation for that, we will sing, as we're accustomed, in Psalm 118, the confession of what it is that opens this way to us.

[32 : 28] Psalm 118, beginning at verse 15, verse 15, that's printed there, we will sing until the elements have been brought by the elders and placed on the table, and that is settled.

So we'll begin at verse 15 of Psalm 118, page 398. in dwellings of the righteous is heard the melody of joy and health, the Lord's right hand doth ever valiantly, the right hand of the mighty Lord exalted is on high, the right hand of the mighty Lord doth ever valiantly, and it's poetry, there is an idea between these verses, therefore I shall not die, but live, and shall the works of God discover or make known, proclaim, and so on we'll sing beginning at verse 15, and we will be standing to sing through the Psalms even while we're at the table, from verse 15 to God's praise.

In dwellings of the righteous it's heard the melody of joy and health the Lord's right hand doth ever quietly the right hand of the mighty Lord exalted is on high the right hand of the mighty Lord doth ever be

I shall not die but live and shall the works so nem but water O set Germany O set Let ye open unto me the gifts of righteousness.

Then will I enter into them. And I, the Lord, will bless.

[35 : 53] This is the gate of God. The just shall enter in.

The will I praise for thy meers. And must my safety be.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're given the warrant for taking the Lord's Supper in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11.

And he writes, For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body which is for you.

[37 : 25] Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, also he took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be

guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.

So, let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

This is the warrant that the Lord gives us to receive the Lord's Supper. And as the Lord himself did on the night in which he was betrayed that Paul tells us about there, he gave thanks for the meal before he broke the bread.

So, we will bow before God in prayer and also give him thanks. Lord God, how can human words express the thanks that is fitting for you?

[38 : 52] Father, when we remember that you have done everything, when we remember that we can bring nothing ourselves, that not one of us is able to stand for anyone else, least of all for the race, for the people.

but yet you have come. You have resolved this. You have filled the gap. You have stood for us. You have continued to intervene and intercede.

And you, Lord, in your Son, have become one with us. We thank you for that. We thank you that that becoming one with us was for the purpose of standing for us.

It was for the purpose of giving very life in an awful way, but yet a mighty way.

Truly it is your mighty arm that has effected the salvation, the great need that we have.

[40 : 12] It is your mighty arm, O Lord, which has held back the power of death, the power of sin, and the awful condition that we would lead ourselves into if it were not for your grace, your mercy towards us.

And so today we give thanks, too, for this sacrament, for the symbols before us, the bread and the wine. We give thanks for these, O Lord, that vividly remind us again of the death of our Lord Jesus, that in the Spirit you teach us and, as it were, lay him before us again, that we have his gift of himself confirmed to us, that it is his life for ours.

We thank you, Lord, that you show us in vivid pictures. We thank you, Lord, that you do bless us day by day with our daily bread, and that we take this to us and we grow, we develop.

We pray, Lord, that we might be found in that growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ by these gifts today. We ask, too, Lord, that you would bless your word that accompanies it, that we will be drawn all the more to the wonder and the praises of the work of our God, mighty to save.

As we give thanks, O Lord, we pray that this, too, would be a rich blessing for our souls. Hear, also, the silent prayers that are offered. Hear, too, the anguished prayers that perhaps cannot be expressed.

[42 : 12] Hear them by your Spirit, we pray. According to your promises. Draw near to us as we would receive from your hand today. We pray that you would bless each one who takes part in this, receiving, as each of us would seek to do, and also those who serve.

Minister to them, and may they have great joy in doing so in your name. We ask that you would hear us through the name of the Lord Jesus. We pray that it will remind us again that it is in Him that we have forgiveness, which we seek once more, that you would accept us through His righteousness.

Amen. Amen. Just before distributing the bread and the cup, just a few further remarks.

As I mentioned early in the service, I'm reminded that on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and He took the cup. He was sharing with His disciples in the Passover remembrance.

Paul calls Him our Passover, as it were, the Passover lamb that was killed and the blood that was spread on the doorposts, fulfilling God's instructions, being obedient by faith.

[43 : 48] And the Passover lamb that therefore took the place of the firstborn in those homes, for those who did believe, who trusted in God's promise. And that was a promise to deliver them from slavery, from bondage.

Jesus was remembering that. It was another demonstration of God providing one in our place. But remember, too, that the lamb was taken for food.

It was roast lamb. And it was to be eaten, nothing left. Or it was to be destroyed. It was for food.

The Israelites were being made ready to go. They didn't know where they were going. They didn't know how they were going to get there. But that night, they had to be ready to move.

If they followed their instructions, they were ready to go where the Lord would lead them. If they took that meal as he taught them to take, they were ready to go.

[44 : 57] Jesus, I think, was also making himself ready as he shared that feast that night. He was ready to go on. He went out into the night to do the will of the Father.

Not my will, but yours be done. Wherever it took him, in the darkness. In the wilderness, as it was for Israel. They went through a wilderness experience.

And this remembrance supper he gives us is not mere sentiment, but it's to prepare you and me to go, quite possibly, into the darkness, quite possibly, into wilderness experience.

but feeding on the ground of our hope. He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

This is your reassurance that wherever he leads you, he will be with you. when you take this supper today, what are you making ready for?

[46 : 15] A comfortable afternoon, speaking together of good things? Encourage one another? But are you also making ready for action?

I think we did have a description in Isaiah of the world that we live in today. It's the world that we go out into. Are you ready for action in that world for the Lord in his name?

Like Israel on the Passover night, making ready to go where the Lord led them. Later, remember, in the wilderness, Israel said, if we could just go back to Egypt, back to our comforts, back to the good food, back to enslavement.

They had hard living in the wilderness. There were enemies all around, but the Lord was in their midst. The Lord is in our midst as we gather together today.

And he remained in their midst. He was at the very heart of those people that they would go on and on and on in his name. And he is present with us.

[47 : 29] And he reminds us we eat this until he comes. He is coming. Let's proclaim it now as we take what he gives us. There's a little more to say after we've observed, reflected, and taken part in his gifts for us, making us ready to go on so we take the Lord's Supper together today.

on that night in which he was betrayed, having given thanks, Jesus took the bread and broke it, saying, this is my body which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. And in the same way, also he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death. until he comes. He comes. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[49 : 06] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.