

The Cross of Jesus and The Message of Reconciliation

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again now to Paul, 2nd chapter 5, and we can read verse number 18 but take! 2nd Corinthians 5, verse 18. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation and so on. Now once today and in the times that we spend together in the next couple of months to think of the benefits of the cross of Jesus Christ and doing so because we all recognize that we may know about the event of the cross of Jesus without actually sharing in or participating in the benefits that flow from the cross.

And we are looking here at a typical example of the way in which the cross has become central to the life of the Apostle Paul. And when we think of the journey that he was on, on the way to Damascus, to at least imprison Christians, and if he could destroy the church of Jesus, Jesus met with him.

And we read in this letter itself in the fourth chapter that his reflection on that is that he saw the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And we want to think of where the gospel takes us, the encounters that we have with God, and especially having this encounter with the Lord Jesus. And through these verses, we recognize that there were a lot of people in Corinth who questioned Paul, who questioned whether he was an apostle or not, and were ready to reject the gospel.

They didn't realize that their relationship with him actually raised a serious question about their salvation and threatened their enjoyment of the promised salvation that God has in Christ. And he goes through these verses to draw attention to the fact that God has empowered him and commissioned him with this gospel which speaks of a new creation. And all of us today, whoever we are, we need a new creation in order to be saved.

And Paul goes on here to explain what that person looks like, what's true about the person who is a new creation.

[2 : 58] And I want to carry with us the picture that C.S. Lewis had in mere Christianity. And we want to kind of go into this Corinthian hall with the apostle Paul and see what doors are there and see which door we must pass through in order to be saved.

And to think especially of the cross of Jesus and the message of reconciliation. I want to think first of all of a new engagement.

People coming together who have lived apart. That's the backdrop to this whole idea of reconciliation that God has given to Paul, the ministry of reconciliation.

Reconciliation speaks of changing an existing relationship to restore it to what it was and what it should be.

And thereby reestablish a new friendship and a living relationship. And when we read our Bibles, that's why God made us.

[4 : 18] Let us make man in our own image after our likeness. We are made in and for our relationship with God. We follow the history of the Bible.

And we see the children of Israel. And God called them. He formed them. Took them from the peoples and the nations of the earth. And made them his own people.

So that you should be mine, he says to them. That's the purpose of God. That's the plan of God. But the plan has run into difficulties.

Because there is a crisis. And the crisis has to do with what we have in verse number 19. Where Paul speaks about trespasses. There has been behavior.

Which has meant that those in this relationship. Have clashed with God. Are no longer doing the will of God. Have rebelled against God.

[5 : 22] And have separated themselves from God. And that's why God says to Israel. To the people of God in Isaiah chapter 59.

Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. And we need to understand that major backdrop to everything that Paul is saying here.

That you and I have broken our relationship with God. And the crisis is universal. But it is also personal.

It's not about the rest of the world. It's about you today. That you are in this personal crisis. Because your sin has caused a breakdown in your relationship with God.

And read through the New Testament. And that's the picture that we have. Paul writing to the people in the church in Ephesus. You have no hope and without God in the world.

[6 : 26] You are dead in your trespasses and sins. You are children of wrath just like others. There has been a disengagement.

There has been a breakdown. And you and I today need to face up to that. And embrace that. If we are to understand what the gospel means.

We are lost sinners who have rebelled against God. And God steps into that crisis.

He steps into that breach. To do something about the separation. And that's what Paul is saying here. That in version of 18, through Christ has reconciled us to himself.

God takes the initiative. God is not reconciling himself. He is reconciling people like you and like me. The change takes place on your side.

[7 : 32] So that the relationship is restored. And the God who is playing about the change. He is reconciling people to himself. It's in that wonderful, in the good news of the gospel.

That is the very core today. Is that God intervenes in your life and in mine. To do something about the separation. That you and I have caused.

To remove the cause of it. And to reestablish. A relationship. That is living. And that is real. Reconciliation. And.

Not only is it staggering that he is doing so. But perhaps more staggering still. Is how he does it. And that's what Paul speaks about in verse number 19. Not counting their trespasses against them. God logs.

[8 : 36] All of our sin. He has a record. He has a book of our lives. Every thought. Every action. Every conversation. Marred by sin.

God has that logged and recorded. Those who are accountants with us. Will understand the whole idea of. Of. Of. Bookkeeping.

And bookkeeping changes. And the way in which. There are debits. In that bookkeeping system. And. As far as. The record for you.

And for me is concerned. There is a debit in our account. Before God. Before. Because of our transgression. And our transgression calls out.

For the punishment of God. For the penalty of God. For the judgment of God. And in a stunning way. At the heart of the gospel.

[9 : 32] Is the fact. That the judge. Who should rightly. Condemn you and me. To eternal lostness. Is. Putting aside. At this stage.

All that is written against us. He is sitting as our judge. He is taking out of our account. Everything that stands against us. And he is welcoming us back into.

A relationship with him. And back into his family. He is not counting. Our transgressions. Against us. Reconciliation.

Paul says. God shows his love. For us. In that. While we are yet sinners. Christ. Died for us. And in this remarkable moment.

The judge. Who should condemn me. Becomes my friend. Who embraces me. The judge. Who should condemn me. Becomes my father. Who takes me home. To his family. The transformation.

[10 : 37] That exists. That exists. In this new engagement. Is life and experience. Changing. For the person. So reconciled. And that's what.

What the gospel offers. To you and to me today. In our lostness. In the crisis. That we have caused. Because of a transgression. Against God.

the only hope that we have is that God makes a new creation through this new engagement with us to embrace us as his own children and from that moment onwards we will be just like Paul the old things will have passed and the new will have come no wonder Paul pleads with them to be reconciled to God to hear the message of his gospel to hear about God's new engagement with them and today if God has already done so you will know in your heart that it has happened this moment cannot go unnoticed it's a new creation and that's why Paul does say in 2 Corinthians 4 that the God who said let light shine in the darkness that creation is a God who shone in our hearts in our dark hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in Christ it cannot happen without us realising it and if it hasn't happened today then you will know it hasn't and you will know you are still in the crisis you are still in the place where God can help but you are still in the crisis unless you sense that God has given you this newness through his engagement with you a new engagement that deserves an explanation and the first part of that explanation brings me to my second point which is the fact there is a new event something has happened that never happened before and in this new event there is a Persian

Persian and the Persian has a special character because he is special and we come to verse 21 where we at the beginning for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin there is someone here who was never in the crisis that you and I are in he never transgressed he never sinned against God he never participated in our plight in that sense he never shared our experience of rebellion against God he is the one not knowing sin and when we seek the identity of this person with this unique characteristic then we don't need to go too far to realize that we are face to face with the Son of God the Lord Jesus Christ whom God sent into the world Jesus in words referred to Jesus in Hebrews 10 we read the way in which

Jesus himself the Son of God says a body you prepared for me the Son of God came into our world the angels told Mary that the child born to her would be wholly the Son of God the unique only Son of God who came into this world to be one of us to live with us but to be distinct from us there is an event and there's a special person of the Lord Jesus at its center it's all about him and that's why Paul is repeatedly going back to the to the cross as being the power of God to salvation to those who believe it's why he keeps going back to the cross as a place where he has separated himself from the world and given his life to the Lord Jesus there's an event and there's a passion and he is precious today to all those who have the new engagement with God or with whom God has entered into a new engagement the new event the special passion and the penalty

[15 : 25] God made him to be sin who knew no sin God did something in one moment he did something down through the Old Testament God has the habit of doing things when the people of God were in Israel he did the great act of salvation from Egypt he brought them across the Red Sea after all the miracles and they rejoiced the people of God rejoiced in him because of what he did for them God acts to ensure that his plan for salvation remains on Cush and here Paul is telling us that it is something unique something unexpected something that brings a new experience into the life of a son an experience that was never in anybody's life before and never will be again he made him to be sin and how we need to in a sense pause and to consider how was this possible that the

Holy Son of God is made sin so that you and I could have peace with God and in the Old Testament we have the image and the sacrifice of a sacrifice being identified with the sins of the people and so when the sacrifice comes into the tabernacle the temple it is identified with the sins of the people and the priest lays the sins on the people and we read and I say at chapter 53 that the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all he made him to be sin he is the sin bearer he is bearing the sins of the world he bore our sins in his own body to the tree to the cross at Calvary and when we come to reckon what is happening we think especially of sin as guilt as penalty and as condemnation what did

Jesus experience as a sin bearer he never became a sinner the sins never tinted his person in any way shape or form but he did experience what it was to be counted guilty he did experience what it was to be condemned he did experience what it was to have that penalty executed in his own person and suspended as he is on Calvary's cross that's the moment at which he is paying the penalty for our sin for the transgressions that were not logged in our account they're taken from our account and placed in his account in this moment and he suffers for them and these transgressions they caused a separation between you and your God and between me and my God and when I go to

Calvary's cross I see Jesus in all of the solitariness of the moment at which he was made sin I read that the disciples fled and left him I read that he cries out to God in the midst of the darkness why have you forsaken me the actual exile that is the eternal punishment eternal death that you and I should suffer Jesus suffered it in these three hours on Calvary's cross he has made sin for us and that whole image of for us it's interesting I think just to note that it's a picture of somebody standing over someone else to protect them from what may come upon them in any particular danger and I think it's a powerful image of what

Jesus did as our substitute he did this for us and he's in that sheltering us from all that we should experience and we should suffer because of our sin a new event God God is the God who did not spare his own son the penalty he endured is the penalty that you and I deserved and in the moment of that punishment our sins are taken away carried away as they were in Leviticus 16 and the day of atonement taken away into a far distant place in the wilderness forgotten to draw attention to the fact of the significance and the value of the sacrifice that had been given the new event today we think of so many different events that grow with all of our attention with star attractions and so many other things that throw our hearts and God wants us today to stop and to think of the greatest event of all time and the greatest portion of all time and what he endured on his own so that blessing would come to you and to me and so in the

[21 : 43] Corinthian hall where we are joining with Paul in these words the door that we must enter is the door that speaks to us of the Lord Jesus Christ Jesus and him crucified a new engagement a new event and thirdly a new existence a new existence for those with whom God engages a new existence for those for whom Christ died so that God did this wonderful thing on Calvary's cross for this purpose in him we might become the righteousness of God and just to help us see that perhaps more clearly to read this into it so that we who don't have righteousness may become the righteousness of God in him there's a becoming and the becoming is the sense of a genesis of a new creation and that's what Paul has referred to in this moment of this new engagement with God there is a new existence that comes to play and into place and it comes to play and in place in him in Christ

Jesus in our relationship with him in our union with him the union through which all of the benefits of his death and of his resurrection become ours the union that Jesus himself describes as being the branches in the vine the union that Paul describes in Romans 11 as being grafted into the olive tree so that we're nourished by the root of the olive tree that union that life that relationship that takes place in this new engagement when we're reconciled to God in Christ Jesus we are found in Christ we become the righteousness of God and if it's a stunning statement that Jesus was made sin it's equally stunning that you and I become the righteousness of God righteousness speaks about conformity to the norms of God's kingdom it speaks of the

God whose kingdom it is and his perfection and his standard and meeting that standard which he himself has put in place for his kingdom it is the righteousness of God it's defined by God it's required by God and it is now provided for us by God the righteousness of God and when we think of the righteousness I want to think of three things as we close righteousness first of all it's an existence that belongs to the new creation new heavens and the new earth what is life like in God's kingdom at the end of the day at the end of the age it is a kingdom of righteousness where all of the people have no sin where all the people stand righteous before

God and their sins are left behind that's what existence will be like in the new kingdom the new heavens and the new earth but in this moment in the moment of this engagement when we become the righteousness of God it does not speak about changing us within and that's why I said earlier the ones not knowing righteousness become the righteousness of God in him this moment does not mean that you are no longer a sinner it does not mean that you no longer transgress it does not mean that you no longer fall away there's another process that deals with our sin as we go on in life but this moment is about declaring two things it's about declaring that we are righteous the judge who accepted us with whom we are reconciled is a judge who is declaring that we have a right standing before him it doesn't say anything about my being it says something about my standing my new existence as this new creation is that

I'm accepted as righteous before God for Jesus sake and we think of the image of Joshua and Zechariah 3 and that's the picture that we have something that we are so familiar with Satan accusing us because of our sin that we cannot belong to the kingdom of God because of our sin and Satan at Joshua's right hand accusing him but then God speaks and take the filthy garments off

him and put on the new garments because I've taken his sin away it's a status it's an existence it's a standing we have peace with God we soon discover that sin remains but there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus the declaration that we are accepted as righteous and we stand with

[28 : 05] Jesus in the kingdom of God accepted by God our father in the same way as Jesus our savior is accepted and then God begins the process of changing us and transforming us to be like his son in our hearts and along with that there is the declaration of forgiveness that's what we sang of in psalm number 32 the person that David considers to be blessed to be envied with desire is this person what is true about him it's the person whose lawless deeds are forgiven it's the person whose sins are covered forgiveness peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ the storm the crisis the coming crisis of the judgment of

God and God's penalty being executed over me and in me because of my sin is replaced by the calm of knowing that my sins are forgiven and as we'll sing in the last psalm that psalm 103 the sense of David rejoicing as far as east is distant from the west so far is he removed from us and his love all our iniquity a new existence praise the Lord for such a new creation that you and I today can experience this new existence because of God's engagement with us and because of what he has done in the Lord Jesus to know that our sins are forgiven to know they are covered and that they are carried away to know that we are accepted before

God and that we shall never be condemned and no matter who lays charges against us in the earth in which we live and from our enemy Satan himself there is no condemnation and if that is the case concerning us we can go in peace and know that the greatest thing that can happen to us has happened because of God's grace that there is the new event that makes us new people so we can become the children of God and no wonder Paul is pleading with them we implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God all of us today need to reflect on the truth about us in our lostness the truth about Jesus and what God has done in him and the truth about what God does in people like you and to me as he embraces us and takes us into his kingdom may

God bless his word let us pray most gracious God we do rejoice in you and your love and your grace in the work of reconciliation in the life of your son the sufferings that he endured on our behalf and the work that you undertake and begin in the lives of your children bless us today with a sense of realising the significance and the preciousness of what took place in the life of your son and help us oh Lord to seek you with all our hearts today and to come to know that peace with you and sense that we have access into the grace that there is in Christ Jesus and find joy and satisfaction and know that you have provided for us in him!

So we pray and hear us and accept us we pray these things for Jesus sake Amen So we now turn to singing psalm number 103 in the psalms it's on page 135 and we're singing at verse number 12 psalm 103 page 135 at verse number 12 and the tune is before the throne as far as east is from the west so far as love has borne away there are many sins and trespasses and all the guilt that on us lay we stand to sing in verse 12 to the verse marked 18 to God's praise as far as east is from the west so far as love!

[33 : 06] Lord is born away our many sins and trespasses And all the guilt that on us lay!

Just as our father loves his child, so God loves those who fear his name,!
he remembers! we are does And well he knows our feeble frame, and well he knows our feeble frame,!

Each human life is like the grass, unlike a meadow that it grows, its place will never be recalled, once over it the tempest blows, but everlasting is God's love for those who fear him and their seed, for those who keep his covenant, and carefully his peace see, and carefully after the benediction of main door please as you leave.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more. Amen. Amen.