

The Iniquity of Us All (Good Friday)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 March 2018

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 0 0] Like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Prophet Isaiah wrote those words hundreds of years before the crucifixion of Jesus, and yet few words actually help us to understand better what the cross, what Good Friday is all about.

But the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. From the earliest days of the Christian church, the cross of Christ was seen as a scandal.

It was the great offense, it was the stumbling block for those who heard the message about Jesus. And not just because crucifixion was a particularly shameful and horrible way to die, though it certainly was that.

In fact, the whole procedure of crucifixion was devised to not just prolong physical pain, but actually more than that, to maximize humiliation and shame.

Roman crucifixion was a way of utterly dehumanizing its victims. It was a method of execution reserved only for those considered the lowest of the low, slaves, outcasts, minorities, rebels.

[1 : 3 2] And so the cross of Christ was offensive on the one hand because the idea of a crucified Messiah, a crucified king, the one the Jews expected to inaugurate a reign of glory, a crucified Messiah was nonsense.

But there was a deeper scandal to the cross. There's a deeper offense. For the message of the cross of Christ is this.

It's that this, the crucifixion of the Son of God, this is what it took for our sins to be rectified, to be forgiven, to be dealt with.

Now, I think most of us would admit that we aren't perfect. We make mistakes. We make bad decisions. We hurt others at times. But still we ask, is our condition so grave, so serious, that it requires the cross?

The truth is that it's only by beholding Jesus crucified for us that we see the real depth and gravity of our sin.

[3 : 0 5] Consider Mark's gospel account that we've been reading tonight. Even before Jesus arrives before Pilate in chapter 15 where we picked up the story, he has been betrayed, abandoned, and then denied by his closest friends.

And then he has been arrested, falsely accused, and condemned by the Jerusalem authorities, the leaders of his own people. And then before Pilate, he's been exchanged for a known criminal, flogged, mocked, and beaten by the Roman soldiers, and then finally crucified outside the city gate where, hanging naked and struggling to breathe and smelling of filth and excrement, the people ridicule him.

He saved others. He cannot save himself. Let this Christ, let this King of Israel come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.

words dripping with ridicule. But still, at this point, we have still not seen the full extent of the cross or of the gravity of our sin.

Mark's gospel highlights three more aspects of what took place that day. First, there is darkness. Mark 15, 33 says, And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

[4 : 45] That is, from noon until 3 p.m. In the middle of the day, there was darkness. Darkness in the middle of the day. You know, it's hard for us to keep track of all the common grace that God showers upon us.

The breath in our lungs, the food on our tables, the clothes on our bodies, the rising sun every morning. But at the cross, these common graces are removed.

Jesus, naked and thirsty, must pull himself up by the nails driven through his wrists just so he can take a breath.

So there he hangs with food and drink and clothing and breath, all gone. And then, even the sun goes out.

In darkness, the Son of God hangs on the cross. The one through whom life and light came into being. The one who is himself the light of the world.

[6 : 01] In darkness, the Son of God hangs on the cross. Because he is bearing our sin.

When we, like sheep, turn everyone to our own way, as Isaiah says. When we do that, we are turning against our creator, the giver of all good gifts.

And as the cross shows us, it is a turn into darkness. Second, there is dereliction.

Mark 15, 34. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi. Lema sabachthani.

Which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Friends, here is a mystery that we cannot comprehend. That God the Son, eternally one with God the Father, could be and is at the cross, God forsaken.

[7 : 10] Jesus is quoting here Psalm 22. Jesus, even in his dying moments, has the words of Scripture on his tongue.

He remains the perfect Son of God, even in this extremity. And yet, in the same moment, becomes sin for us. He remains the curse of our sin.

You see, friends, the real gravity of our sin is not just that we deserve to be cut off from God's good gifts, as we saw in the darkness of verse 33, but that we deserve to be cut off from God himself.

Sin, you see, is not the mere accumulation of bad deeds. More fundamentally, it's a tearing of the fabric of our relationship with God.

So grave, so serious, that the only thing that could put it right again is God himself stepping out into the forsakenness for us.

[8 : 25] Jesus' story of the prodigal son tells of a son who demands his inheritance from his father and then goes off into a far country.

And there, in that far country, spends all that he has, all of his father's inheritance, to find happiness and friendship and joy. But there, in that far country, he has lost the only lasting source of joy, the embrace of his father.

So much for the prodigal son, but how do we get home again? You see, the chasm that has opened when we rebelled against God, the rift that opened up before us is so deep and so wide that we cannot, in our own strength, cross over.

The road back home is too long. And so, for us, the Son of God goes out into that far country.

And he does not merely come to the border of that land and send messages across begging us to come back home. No, the Son of God goes the whole way in.

- [9 : 57] Out into the God-forsakenness of our sin. And his robes are torn off. And his name is mocked. And his body is marred.
- And at last, even the eternal love of his father, in a cosmic mystery we shall never understand, even the love of the father goes silent.
- My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? There's darkness. And there's dereliction.
- There's forsakenness. And third, there's death. Mark 15, 37 says, poignantly and simply. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.
- Earlier in Mark's gospel, Jesus would describe his death as a ransom. The Son of God came not to be served, but to serve, Jesus would say. And to give his life as a ransom for many.
- [11 : 06] A ransom is a payment. It's a payment to release someone from slavery or to release someone from a debt. But just how costly is our sin?
- What is this debt that we've accrued, that we've turned everyone to our own way? It's so easy to exclude ourselves from the real problem in the world, isn't it?
- We so quickly can count up all the good things that we have done and so quickly list all the bad things that we have not done. And we think, surely my debt is not so great.
- But the cross shows us otherwise. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. We are all included there.
- Too quickly we compare ourselves to other people and think that our debt is not so great. But look, friends, at the price Jesus paid.
- [12 : 10] The ransom that he paid. Which was his own life for ours. Too often we compare ourselves to other people.
- But to truly grasp the gravity of sin, we have to view ourselves instead in relation to God. Because the magnitude of sin is determined by the majesty of God and not by the measure of other people.
- The magnitude of our sin is determined by the majesty of God and not the measure of other people. Imagine two families.
- The first family has one child. The second family has two children. And both families ignore and neglect their children emotionally and physically and so on.
- Now consider in that example, is the first family with only one child only half as bad as the second family with two children?
- [13 : 20] Are they only half as culpable because they've done half the wrong? Something in us kind of rightly recoils at that suggestion.
- No, we say. They're both culpable. We can't actually compare them in that way. And why? Why is that? Well, it's because the worth of just one child is so great.
- When we grasp the dignity and worth of a human being, of a human child, we see how great the debt of both of those hypothetical families would be. And it's the same in our relationship with God.
- When we grasp the infinite worth of God, then we see that comparing ourselves to other people doesn't actually lessen the gravity of sin. Because at the end of the day, we've all sinned against God.
- And we've all failed to love and care as we ought to for that which God loves. Every angry word and every lustful thought and every moment of greed is against a creature whom the infinite God loves.

[14 : 44] So no matter what form or circumstance or expression our sin might take, the infinite God has still been the object. And so the cost of that sin, the debt that we've incurred, is nothing short of total.

Our whole lives are forfeit. I wonder if you have ever experienced massive debt.

A debt that you know you'll never be able to repay. Perhaps you know what it's like to be financially in that kind of situation. Maybe credit cards or student loans or gambling or addiction or some such thing have built up such a debt that you know that there's no way out.

Or perhaps you know what that's like relationally to be in such a situation. You've wronged someone so deeply that there's no way out of the debt.

You'll never in your own strength be able to make things right. There's nothing that you could do to repay or repair the damage that's done. The cross is a scandal and a stumbling block because it says that our sin has buried us in a debt that we can never repay.

[16 : 19] And the interest will accumulate and compound faster than we can ever hope to make amends for. And the principle still remains untouched.

The cost is so great that the Son of God must die to ransom you. The only thing that could release you from the ever accumulating debt of your sin is the death of Christ.

The payment of Jesus' own life for yours. The cross shows us that our sin is greater than we could have ever imagined.

So friends, tonight then, I wonder if you would be willing to come to terms with the gravity of sin. Will you confess to God that you have so often minimized your sinfulness, so often compared yourself to others to feel better about yourself and in so doing, ignored God all the more?

Will you admit that you've often mentally excluded yourself from the company of those kind of people thinking that they're the real problem and not me? And tonight, would you be willing to look hard at your life right now?

[18 : 02] What so-called little sins have you been harboring? What grudges have you continued to bear? What frustration and angry words have you continued to excuse?

What lustful, selfish thoughts have you continued to indulge? What discontentment and jealousy have you continued to harbor? What sin is the most?

What do you mean to God? What sin is the most? And will you see in each of these seemingly innocuous sins, their real gravity, that like a cord, each one is connected and inseparably tied to the sin for which Christ was crucified?

tonight make your confession to God in prayer and where necessary make your confession in person to those whom you've wronged and do so knowing this that the son of God not only had to die for our sins because they were so great but he also chose to die for our sins because of his immense love for us into your darkness and dereliction and death Jesus willingly went for you in an exchange that brings you into his light and into his favor and into his life mark's account of the crucifixion ends with the temple curtain being torn in two and a roman centurion proclaiming truly this man was the son of God mark showing us there that God's presence and God's favor are now freely available to everyone and to anyone who believes even those of us who hammered the nails let's pray our father we confess that we often don't take time to think about the gravity of our sin before you lord there are so many other things and so many other topics that consume our thoughts and our minds and our hearts lord it's hard we confess to come to grips with this and yet we also thank you that you've shown us in one great act of the cross not just how great our sins are but how powerful was your victory over them lord give us real humility give us real repentance grant us real faith tonight we pray in Jesus name amen