

The Better Sacrifice

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[0 : 00] Now, as you look at other religions in the world, Christianity is really a peculiar religion.

Temples that are built. Maybe they're seen in the luxurious images that are carved to resemble their gods or goddesses. Or maybe even a person is deified, like an emperor or a pharaoh, even.

We, however, worship a Savior who didn't seek greatness for himself, but he came to the earth in humility. He didn't aspire to use his divinity to exalt himself over his father, but surrendered himself to living a life of obedience for the glory of the one that sent him.

His life of obedience didn't lead to any conquering of any great earthly foe or the establishment of some great earthly kingdom. But Jesus, claiming that his kingdom was not of this earth, surrendered himself into the hands of sinful men.

Sinful men that were created to bear his very image. Who crucified him on a wooden cross. At the pinnacle of man's sinfulness in history.

[1 : 38] On the very day that we are gathered here to observe today. Creation sought to destroy its own creator. And all through Jesus' ministry on earth, his followers kept watching and they kept waiting for him to finally reveal himself to be the Messiah that they had all hoped for.

To be a great deliverer. To be a great political figure that would bring Israel back onto the world stage again. But instead, the life and mission of our Savior led him to the cross.

Jesus was betrayed by a disciple that was close to him. He was led through a rigged trial. He was convicted by a Roman ruler who was more concerned about his political career than serving actual justice.

And this is where our text picks up today. So if you have your Bible, I want to invite you to join me. John chapter 19, verses 17-42.

It's a rather long passage tonight. But I think, just given the occasion that we are gathered here, it warrants reading this whole narrative. To just hear again what Christ has done for us.

[2 : 54] Because we can never be reminded too often of the cross and what was accomplished on it. So starting in verse 17 of chapter 19. So they took Jesus and went out bearing his own cross to the place called the place of the skull.

Which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him. And with him two others. One on either side. And Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross.

It read, Jesus of Nazareth. The king of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this inscription. For the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. And it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.

This is just so that anyone in the Roman Empire that might have read this. That it would be an example to never cross the Roman Empire. That everyone would understand that nobody could stand up to the might of the Roman Empire.

And Pilate answered, What I have written. I have written. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garment and divided them into four parts.

[4 : 08] One part for each soldier. Also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said to one another, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.

This was to fulfill the scripture which says, They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. So the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, Behold your mother.

And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst.

And a jar full of sour wine stood there. So they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, It is finished.

[5 : 20] And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was a day of preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath was a high day, the Jews asked Pilate for their legs to be broken, that they might be taken away.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

Not one of his bones will be broken. And again, another scripture says, They will look on him whom they have pierced. After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission.

So he came and took away the body, and Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds in weight.

[6 : 48] So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as it is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had been laid.

So because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there. This is the word of the Lord, church. So it is finished.

I have to wonder, as people were looking on and they heard this, what they must have been thinking when Jesus said these words. What was finished? What possible authority could a man undergoing his own execution have to say that anything is finished at all?

The Romans looked on in mockery, thinking that a revolution had been put down, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They looked on in arrogant satisfaction, as they now thought that their place in society and their status was secure.

And his followers watched in despair, as their hopes for a Messiah, a great deliverer, were crushed. And a mother watched in horror, as her son was savagely executed and reviled by the crowd.

[8 : 06] You should have to wonder if the disciples were going through all the lessons and all the words that Jesus had taught them over the years. Jesus said, I am the vine. I am the door.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the good shepherd. How could this be the fulfillment of all that God had promised and all that Jesus had taught?

I want to point out, though, that the crucifixion, the very death of Christ, is rife with prophetic fulfillment. Jesus' followers, they were always excited when they could see Jesus fulfilling these prophecies during the ministry.

He was healing the sick. He was raising the dead. He had the right family line. He came from the right place of birth. Then, he's crucified. Somehow they had missed these prophetic fulfillments of his death.

In Isaiah 53, verse 7 and 50, verse 6, it says that he was silent in the face of accusations, mocked, beaten, and spat on. Isaiah 53, verse 5, says he was pierced for our transgressions.

[9 : 18] Psalm 22, 16-18, his hands and feet were pierced and clothes were divided by lot. Isaiah 53, verse 9, a death among criminals and buried in a rich man's tomb.

Psalm 22, verse 8, even tells of the mockery that Jesus was faced by the Pharisees and the Sadducees as he hung upon the cross.

Church, the crucifixion of Christ is a well-documented event in history. And we have writings here, and these are just a few of the writings about Jesus. We have writings detailing this event 700 years before it even occurred.

We look on the cross with horror, but we also look on the cross and see the faithfulness of God to his promises, that he will fulfill every word that he has promised to us.

Being in God's will and suffering doesn't always add up to people. Because oftentimes we associate suffering with consequences. So suffering and being in God's will, for a lot of people, especially the disciples at this point, it oftentimes brings up more questions than answers.

[10 : 33] A wrong has been committed and suffering seems to be just in the world's eyes. Even the thief on the cross that was next to Christ, he recognized his own guilt for the crimes that he had committed.

So how could a crucified Messiah! be in the center of God's will? Isaiah 53, verses 10-12 Say this, Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief. When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring. He shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul, he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall be the righteous one. My servant, make many to be accounted righteous.

And he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.

[11 : 38] Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Church, what was finished on the cross? When Jesus cried out with his final breath, it is finished. What was finished?

Our atonement. The price for our sins had been paid in full. Jesus didn't deserve this death, but it was still in line with the Father's perfect will to crush his son.

But why? Wasn't he the good shepherd? Wasn't he the one promised in Ezekiel when God said, I myself will come shepherd my people?

Yes, church, he is the good shepherd. And throughout his whole ministry, he showed himself to be a good shepherd. But there was also another title given to him by John the Baptist.

[12 : 41] He said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This was God's Lamb. Not our Lamb.

This was God's Lamb. This was God's offering. And just as the Jews were all too familiar with, a sacrifice needed to be brought to the temple. A spotless Lamb.

And when they would stand before the priest with their Lamb, they would place their hands on the head of this Lamb in a way of saying, Yes, I have sinned, and it is going to be at the cost of this innocent, spotless Lamb's life.

Church, Jesus is the only good shepherd that could become one of the lambs and still save his flock. He is the only sacrifice that could have been sufficient to cover all of our sins once and for all. He is greater than any number of lambs or goats that we could ever offer. Why is his sacrifice better? First of all, it's because of the one that is offering the sacrifice.

[13 : 49] Jesus is the Lamb of God. And not only is this sacrifice spotless and perfect, but the very one who demands justice and wrath for sin and is perfectly just and expecting these things.

He is the one that is offering the sacrifice. He is the one that is offering atonement, not for his sins, but for those that stand guilty before him. Second thing is that his sacrifice is better because he is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament has pointed to and promised.

Where the sacrifice of lambs and goats could not bring righteousness, Christ's sacrifice brought righteousness. Where Israel had failed in the wilderness, Christ succeeded over temptation.

Where the blood of sacrifices would run out, Jesus' blood is continually interceding on our behalf.

Where the temple was needed to meet with God's presence, Jesus came as a new temple to be God's presence among us.

When the words of the prophets had ceased, the very word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. Can the law make us right before God? No. Jesus makes us right before God.

[15 : 05] And we need to rely on His sacrifice because everywhere where we have failed in our lives and there is much to speak of on our failures, church, Christ has succeeded and He is innocent.

And He was that sacrifice for us on our behalf. The price that we could not pay. Hebrews 9, 13-15 says, For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Therefore, He is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

It is finished, church. There is nothing more to give. There is no greater payment that can be made. And because God is unchanging, because He is immutable, we now have that faith that this won't change either.

His mind won't change. He won't look at His Son and say, you need to go back to the cross. It was completely finished, church. The cross is where God's wrath on sin and His mercy on sinners are portrayed right before our eyes.

[16 : 36] And the great news of the gospel, the reason why we can cherish that old rugged cross is because when we gaze on it, it is not us on the cross.

It is Christ, God's spotless Lamb that can take away the sins of the world, that can bring righteousness to a guilty people.

The altar had been stained with innocent blood, but church, the story does not end here. Victory is coming. What seemed like the darkest day in history was only the first part of this story.

we will celebrate the rest of this story because Easter is coming, church. Let's pray. Father, we thank You that You have offered Your Son, Jesus, as Your spotless Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.

Lord, no sacrifice that we could offer, no life that we could ever live would be enough to atone for the sins that we have committed against You. Lord, in Your righteous wrath, You were pleased to crush Your Son on our behalf.

[18 : 08] We didn't deserve this. Your Son did not deserve this. But Lord, we know that this is the only way that we could ever stand righteous before You.

So Lord, we thank You for this sacrifice. Lord, I pray that as we are about to observe the Lord's Supper, Lord, You have given this sacrament to us as a way to remind us of what Christ has done on our behalf.

Lord, to also remind us that because of what Christ has done, we can look forward to taking this meal again with Him one day in paradise. So Lord, I pray that tonight that as we are continuing in worship through the Lord's Supper, Lord, that we would remember what Christ has done.

Lord, that we would glory in the cross, that we would be grateful for the sacrifice that Christ has made. And Lord, if there is someone here tonight that has not ever trusted in that perfect sacrifice, that has not been atoned for, then Lord, I pray that You would move in their hearts.

Lord, that You would draw them to Yourself. Lord, that they would become increasingly aware of their sinfulness. Accept the righteousness that Christ offers to all who call on Your name.

[19 : 31] I pray for all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.