

Christ Died - For Our Sins

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In the Bible there are two kinds of sentences. One of these kinds is the historical kind. The Bible tells us of certain events that occurred in history such as, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and David was king and so on. In recent years the discoveries of archaeology have corroborated the accuracy of many such statements. And this is all to the good. We are very thankful to have the evidence of archaeology supporting the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Another of these historical statements is the statement - Christ died. If this had not happened - if Christ had not died and in fact if David, if in truth David was never king of Israel and if the exodus had not occurred there would be no Christianity. These historical statements are parts of Christianity. For Christianity is a historical religion. Not merely in the sense that it has had a history for 2,000 years but that it is based on historical occurrences. And if these occurrences are not true, if they did not actually happen, we cannot maintain any Christian faith. We are committed to certain historical truths.

However, Christianity is not simply a matter of historical occurrences. Of course there would be no Christianity if it weren't true that Christ died. But let us say that Christ died. What of it? Pilate died too. The Pharisees died. They all died. The mere fact that a certain man died, taken by itself, is of great significance and therefore, the Bible has a second type of statement in it. In addition to the statements of historical occurrences, the Bible gives the explanation of these occurrences. For Christianity not only depends upon history but it also depends on a philosophy of history. It depends on an explanation of the events that occurred. And the great difference between the event of Christ's death and the equally historical event of Pilate's death or the pharisees' deaths is the significance and explanation of that death. And in the verses given as the title for this morning we have a very brief statement of the explanation of that event. Christ died for our sins. And to

indicate that there is more to it than just those few words the verse goes on to say "according to the scriptures," showing that there is a very detailed explanation of the meaning of Christ's death. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." Now it is very advantageous for Christians to have the support of archaeology with reference to many of the historical statements both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. But you could dig into the sands of antiquity and uncover barrels of sherds and other artifacts and you would never have any archaeological confirmation of the fact that Christ died for our sins. This theological explanation is not amenable to archaeological evidence. They personally admit the events and yet deny the explanation given in the scriptures.

How then may we persuade or begin to persuade a person to accept the explanation that the Bible gives? How can we indicate to him that man is a sinner and that something ought to have been done about it? The Bible has a lot to say about sin. If you will read the third chapter of Romans beginning at verse 8, you see a series of quotations from places in the Old Testament emphasizing the depth of human sin. "There is none righteous - no not one." "There is none that seeketh after God." "The poison of asps is between their lips and many other things." "Their throat is an open sepulchre." It is altogether a very horrible picture of human nature. Not one that a human being would be proud of. Is it possible to convince people that this is a true picture of human nature and that sin is a serious thing?

Let me give a little illustration and since the subject is sin I suppose a sinful illustration would be most appropriate. And I'll choose a group of boys shooting craps. I hope you all know something about craps. I think knowledge is a very fine thing and I would not even prevent you from knowing about shooting craps or breaking a safe. Knowledge is a very fine thing. Well these boys are gathered around a circle and they are shooting craps and one of them picks up the dice. He rolls them out and they come seven. That's lucky! Then he picks them up again and rolls them out and they come seven. That's remarkable! He picks them up and he rolls them out and they come seven. That's suspicious.

And the other urchins in the game begin to philosophize. I'm all in favor of philosophizing. And these urchins learn philosophy fast. They argue that the angles at which the dice hit the pavement and the force with which they hit, the velocity - all these things differ from one throw to another and hence these factors cannot explain uniform result. And by this process of elimination they arrive at the startling conclusion that the symbol cause that is present in all these throws is inside the dice. I would be willing to give those two each an A in philosophy.

Now if you examine the human race you will find a certain uniformity. A uniformity in the fact that everybody does what is wrong. People may not want to accept the biblical doctrine of sin. That is too depressing, but most people will admit they have done what is wrong and if they don't admit it, all you have to do is ask their neighbors. And this is true all over the world. Now if sinfulness was the result of altitude you would find the sinners in the higher parts of the world in the mountainous regions. And everybody that lived in the American plains would be quite good. Or if sinfulness was a matter of the density of population why of course, you will find sinners in New York city everybody knows that, and in Chicago. But then you would expect the farmers to be angels, and they're not! All men do what is wrong.

Now then can we not with some plausibility conclude that the reason for this uniformity is a cause that exists inside the man? It is not a matter of external forces but it is a part of human nature. It comes from within and of course it works itself out. Not only are the dice loaded - men are loaded too. They have an inborn tendency to do what is wrong. We call it total depravity. They are dead in sin. They are born with this ingrained desire to go in the wrong direction. Oh, but someone may say, that is a little too fast. If you try to argue that the occurrence of evil deeds leads to the conclusion that man has an evil nature can you not with equal logic argue that the occurrence of good deeds leads to the conclusion that man has a good nature? And in as much as men do many more good deeds than evil deeds would you not be forced to conclude that man's good nature

is far stronger than his evil nature? Of course people do what is wrong. But not all the time. Why even the worst criminals only commit murder on Saturday night. And for the rest of us, why we're pretty good almost all the time. The proportion of good deeds to evil deeds is so great that we cannot accept the biblical position that man is born in sin and that human nature is depraved. This point concerning the proportion of good deeds to evil deeds is a point that I am not going to avoid or evade I will come back to it in a minute or two. But before speaking of the proportion of good deeds to evil deeds, I would like to make another point and make it clear. Namely that this matter of proportion is not the point. It is beside the point. It is not the issue - it doesn't have much to do with the discussion.

Well, what is the point? What is the question then? Let us ask the question as clearly as we can. It is this. Is human nature such that it tends toward innocence and favor with God or is it not? Listen carefully to this question. Is human nature such that it naturally tends to innocence and favor with God or not? Now innocence and favor with God require complete obedience - uniform obedience to God's command. For God being God can require no less than His requirements. And to break the law in one instance is to be guilty of all. Proportion is not the matter. The question is, is human nature naturally, does it tend naturally to innocence and favor with God?

I'll give another illustration. We're approaching vacation time. You're taking off as soon as possible, and so are we. And it is very lovely, it's too bad we can't have a longer vacation than we have. If it were, why we might go to Europe and that would be very desirable. Not only being in Europe but the ocean voyage too. I like ocean voyages and our family doesn't get seasick - well hardly ever. But we enjoy sailing and so we might take a slow boat to Europe and enjoy the bonny breezes and the swells as we go up in the bow of the boat and look over and you can see the flying fish jump across. It is very nice. And so you sail along for nine or ten days because this is a slow boat, enjoying things very much. And then on the tenth day some bad weather occurs and to shorten the

story, some of the plates drop off the boat and there is a hole, and the water gets in and the thing starts to sink, and you soon find yourself with a life preserver out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. And as one of the waves sweeps you a littler higher you can see now at a short distance the stern of the boat disappearing for the last time under the waves. And as you gulp a bit of Atlantic ocean you remark what a wonderful ship that is. It's sailing days were nine and its sinking days were one. The proportion of good sailing dayd to bad sailing days overwhelms me.

And yet when we come to examine not the illustration but the actuality I think we are forced to go a little further. And we can not even say that the good sailing days of the human race are nine as against one. The proportion is not so high. In fact it's quite the reverse. Now let us consider one of God's commandments. And if you wish to talk to an unbeliever you might wish to select a commandment that he would more or less admit that God might require and there is one in the Bible that many people would be willing to consider a requirement of God even though they didn't believe the Bible. The commandment is this: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and strength and mind." Oh, let us forget about the unbeliever. Let's ask ourselves this question. Do we keep this commandment nine days out of ten? Do we even keep this commandment one day out of ten? Do we ever keep this commandment? Is it not true that as we sit in church or as we kneel to pray there are distracting thoughts that come through our minds and we are not able to love God with all our strength and soul and mind. Do we ever keep this commandment? I'm afraid not, because human nature naturally tends to disobedience rather than to innocence and favor with God. And for this reason the cure of sin must be something that operates on the inside. The cause of sin is not external circumstances but it is an inner cause and the cure of sin must likewise be something that operates within us and not from the outside to fix up the outside of us or to remove the slums and give us good housing, nice clothing, but something that changes our nature. And this is the Christian message - that Christ died for our sins. We have to be regenerated.

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We have to be changed. This requires the divine action of God. Preaching and teaching with their importance nonetheless do not do this. If they did - well they don't - here's a good example of it.

Noah was a godly man. You read that the Spirit of Christ spoke through him to the people of his day. And as a godly man, I think we may assume that he tried to train his children, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And in addition the children of Noah had an advantage which you and I have never had. They saw the evident displeasure of God visited upon the ungodly in the flood. Now, if a godly upbringing and this visible displeasure of God were in themselves effective, the children of Noah would never have sinned after that time. But as you may realize the remainder of the story is quite dismal. There must be a working of the Holy Spirit in the person, who will change the sinful nature and give him a nature by which he can approach Christ and benefit by the death of Christ which was offered as a penalty for our sin. I have no doubt that in this chapel and from this pulpit the gospel of Christ's redeeming work has been proclaimed many times. I give a little indication of it here but it has undoubtedly been given in much more detail than I can in just a few minutes. However, to make it clear and to conclude this talk I would like to express this gospel of Christ's redeeming death in words as accurate and as appropriate as any words that you can find outside of the Bible itself. It is expressed in words that are quite familiar to you.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From Thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hands I bring,  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.