



JESUS DIED IN OUR PLACE

Part 1 of Christ on the Cross

Pastor Mark Driscoll | October 02, 2005

Jesus Christ is his name. Jesus means “God saves.” Christ means “the anointed one of God.” Jesus was born roughly 2,000 years ago in an unimportant small rural town to a teenage woman named Mary.

Jesus lived a relatively simple life. He never traveled more than 200 miles from his home. He never wrote a book. He never married. He never had children, never ran for political office, never oversaw a large company, never made much money. The first 30 years of his life were spent in relative obscurity working a simple, blue-collar job as a carpenter with his dad. The last three years of his life he spent doing ministry, preaching, teaching, performing miracles. He died at the age of 33, one year younger than me.

In his wake is the largest legacy in the history of the world. More songs have been sung to, more paintings painted of and more books written about Jesus than anyone in the history of the world. In fact, human history is divided around his life. We have B.C., which is before Christ and A.D., which is Anno Domini, the year of our Lord, that history literally hinges on this man.

Time Magazine called him Man of the Millennium, the most important man who has ever lived, recognized by Christians and non. And today on planet Earth there are a few billion people who worship that man, Jesus Christ, as the only God. They take for themselves, as we do, the name Christian, which was initially a derogatory slang attributed to us by our enemies simply declaring that we thought we were to be like little Christs. And the Christians took it upon themselves as a badge of honor saying, yes, most indeed, we want to live for Jesus. We want to live like Jesus. And when life comes to an end, we want to be with Jesus.

Perhaps most curious about Jesus’ legacy is the symbol which represents his life and his death, that namely being the cross, which is the most widely known and popular symbol in the history of the world. It was the early Christians that would put it as artwork to adorn their home. Some of you wear one this day around your neck, and beginning with the church father Tertullian, Christians were taught to make the sign of the cross.

And when we see the cross, we are reminded of Jesus, not just of his life but of his death, his death by crucifixion, crucifixion being the most horrendous, despicable, painful, agonizing form of death. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus calls it “the most wretched of deaths.” In speaking of crucifixion, it was Cicero who declared that Roman citizens should not think of the cross, should not speak of the cross because it was too altogether horrifying for decent Roman citizens to even contemplate or utter.

Throughout the course of history, crucifixion has been reserved for the most despicable deaths. It was Nazi Germany under the leadership of Adolf Hitler that crucified Jews at Dachau. It was Nazi soldiers who crucified an Allied soldier in World War II by sticking him to a door with bayonets and with knives through his shoulders and his arms and his throat. It was the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia that crucified innocent civilians and soldiers. And today in the Sudan there are still people who are being crucified.

Crucifixion is so altogether horrendous that we had to create a word to explain it, that word being excruciating. Excruciating literally means “from the cross.”

Crucifixion began roughly 500 years before the birth of Jesus with the Persians, and it continued for some 900 years until 300 years after the death of Jesus when the Roman Emperor Constantine, who was the first professing Christian Roman emperor forbade it and put an end to crucifixion.

It was the Persians who invented it, but it was the Romans who perfected it. They reserved it for the lower classes, for slaves, for foreigners, and only very rarely would Roman citizens be crucified. They would have to do something as awful as high treason to receive that kind of penalty and punishment.

A death by crucifixion was often slow, agonizing, horrifying death by asphyxiation in a public manner. This was not done in obscurity. This was something that would be done outside of the Fred Meyer down the street. This is something that would be done in front of Westlake Mall downtown or in Belltown or down on First Hill or somewhere down by Safeco Field or down in Freemont.

This was done openly and publicly, and the death could sometimes take days as people literally wilted under the heat of the sun, as they were mocked and jeered at, as people threw stones at them and laughed at them, as the slowed into that state of deep and hard and labored breathing, as they died by asphyxiation because as they would hang, their lungs would have a hard time taking in and sending out precious air, and it could take days for someone to die.

What they would do upon occasion then to prolong the agony and the death, they would put a small seat or a ledge underneath the buttocks of the person being crucified. It was almost always men that were crucified. Occasionally, a woman was crucified. Sometimes the men were crucified at eye level so you could look them right in the eye while they died. And it was customary when they would crucify the women to have them face the cross because no one wanted to see the face of a woman in that kind of agony.

To prolong the death, particularly of the men, they would put a small seat or a ledge underneath the buttocks of the men to keep him up so that he couldn't slouch down and suffocate to death. They knew they were going to die. They wanted to die as quickly as possible, and their executioners, in an effort to prolong their torment, would provide this seat under their buttocks. And what they found is that men would lift themselves off the seat, fall down and suffocate to death, thereby ending their torment. So in an effort to ensure that they didn't get off that seat, they would take the man's penis, and they would nail it to the cross with a seven-inch spike.

Literally, excruciating pain. They were not given a common decent burial. The body would die on the cross, and it would be left there for birds and vultures. Pieces would fall to the ground. It was reported that occasionally a dog would return home with a hand or a foot as a chew toy. Whatever was left would be thrown into the dump.

And this was done frequently. Tens of thousands of people were crucified. As many as 6,000 were crucified on any single day. Though Spartacus died in battle, 6,000 of his followers were crucified in one day to serve as an example for anyone who would think and act like them. They were put up along a highway that stretched for over 120 miles. It would be no different than today if between Seattle and the great city of Vancouver, B.C., I-5 was just filled with crosses with 6,000 people dying slow and agonizing deaths.

The day that Jesus was crucified, two men were crucified with him, one at each side. It was common. Some years later, his disciple Peter who was the leader of the disciples was to be crucified. When they went to crucify him, Peter simply declared, "I am unworthy to die like Jesus. Hang me upside down." And they did.

Perhaps most peculiar about crucifixion and the cross and the death of Jesus is this simple fact. Christians, including myself, declare it to be good news, the best news we have ever heard. And the question remains to be answered how could this be good news? The word that the Bible uses for good news is gospel. This is our gospel. This is our good news. And for some, it is not good news at all. For some, it is just horrifying, and there's nothing lovely in it.

The great Hindu teacher Mahatma Gandhi was one who did not see the beauty of the cross, did not delight or enjoy the cross, did not find any good news in the cross. Some of you have been lied to. You've been told that all religions are essentially the same. No, they are not. Some love the crucified Jesus, and some don't. It's that simple.

Gandhi didn't. He says this. He says that, "Jesus' death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it my heart could not accept." Gandhi says Jesus was a great guy and a good teacher just like me, but on the cross there was no good news, just another man suffering.

To understand why it is good news, we must move from the historical facts to the theological understanding and interpretation of those facts. Jesus died. Why is that good news? In the shortest summation of the gospel in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15, "What I received I pass onto you of first importance," most important fact, in all of human history. The first aspect of that fact is this. He declares, "Christ died." All by itself, that is not good news. Christ died.

And then Paul gives us the theological understanding of that event. He uses a profoundly important word "for" to move us from the fact to its importance in our lives. "Christ died for our sins." That's why it's good news, the best news we've ever heard, the only hope we've ever had.

Christ died. Why? For our sins. Theologically the Bible calls this atonement. My goal today is to make you all into theologians. Atonement is what was made at the cross of Jesus. It's a doctrine that's under attack today perhaps like no other time in history. Young pastors, cool pastors, hip pastors, urban pastors, they shy away from the cross. Oh, it's offensive. Paul said it would be. It's a stumbling block. The other religions or the people who think they're good, they trip over it. The Bible declares that they should.

This doctrine of the atonement is under attack. Just wrote a chapter for a book debating for this doctrine. It's coming out, and my heart is just broken that we even need to debate this. But as our people, I need you to grasp the severity of the doctrine of the atonement and the importance of the death of Jesus for our sins.

The doctrine of the atonement begins in the Old Testament. Any of you that were raised Jewish or have Jewish friends, it may bring to mind the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the celebration of the Day of Atonement. See, in the Old Testament beginning in Leviticus, particularly 16 and 17, it tells us about the Day of Atonement.

The problem was that God's wrath rested on sinful people. The Bible mentions wrath from God more than 600 times. And from the first to the last page of the Bible, it is emphatically, consistently, repeatedly and clearly declared that we are all sinners and that God's wrath rests on sinners and that the Day of Atonement was the means by which sin was dealt with. And on that day the High Priest representing all the people would take two goats, and one goat would be slaughtered. Blood would be shed. The animal would die. As Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." And it would show that the wage for sin is death, that when you sin, you die. The animal dies as a substitute in the place of the sinful people at the hands of the High Priest.

The second goat called the “scapegoat,” was then sent out into the wilderness. Before being sent out into the wilderness, the High Priest would lay hands over that animal, would confess the sins of the people, and then the animal would take those sins away, all of which was leading to Jesus our High Priest, who sheds his blood for the remission of our sins and is our scapegoat and takes our sins – past, present and future – and causes them to be taken from us and that God would remember them no more.

Because of that, it is good news to those of us who believe. And this doctrine of the atonement is so important. Even the word itself is important. Atonement means “at one ment,” that sin has separated us from God and that atonement is the means by which God seeks to be one with us again. It’s the language of love and relationship and reconciliation, restoration. “At one ment.” At the cross, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, making us one with him again. The great theologian John Calvin says it this way. The Father wanted his kids back. That’s what atonement means.

Atonement was promised in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the life of Jesus, echoes throughout the New Testament. It’s one of the great threads that weaves your whole Bible together. I’ll read you some of the verses.

Romans 3:25. Paul, who was a murderer of Christians, was a man who was delighted with the murder of Jesus, realized that he was wrong, went on to be a pastor. He writes in Romans 3:25, “God presented him” – that being Jesus – “as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.”

Jesus’ youngest disciple John writes in 1 John 2:1,2, “My dear children,” he says, “I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours but also the sins of the whole world.”

At 1 John 4:10, he declares, “This is love.” When you see the cross, know that you are loved by Jesus and God the Father and God the Spirit. You are loved, and this is love. “Not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his son Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” And friends, they are many.

Hebrews 2:17, summarizing the teaching of the Old Testament on atonement, says this. “For this reason, he – Jesus – had to be made like his brothers in every way.” God became a man to identify with us. “In order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of his people.”

The theologians also call this “penal substitution” or “substitutionary atonement,” that Jesus Christ substituted himself in our place. He suffered. He died physically. He was separated from the Father and the Holy Spirit and died spiritually. He did so as a substitute in our place. He did so to pay the penalty for our sins because the wage for sin is death.

The Bible repeatedly declares that Jesus Christ went to the cross, not just as our example but as our substitute. Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah the prophet declares in 53, verses 10 through 12, “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him, to cause him to suffer. And though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.” That’s a promise of resurrection.

“By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many and bear their iniquities” – or their sins. “Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great. He will divide the spoils with the strong because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors for he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.” Jesus is God who became a man. He lived without sin. Hebrews says “he was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.”

Jesus went to the cross as a substitute in our place. He died for our sins. Jesus alone can reconcile a holy God to a sinful people because he, as God, became a man, took upon himself sin. That’s why Paul says “there is only mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ.”

Romans 5:8 says it this way. I love this verse. “God demonstrates his love for us” – his love for us – “in this. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” While we were still having sex with our boyfriend or girlfriend, while we were still getting drunk, we were still reviling our parents, when we were still lying and stealing and cheating and selfish and perverted, while we were still dishonoring our husband, while we were still cheating on our wife, while we were still beating our children, while we were still ignoring God, God demonstrated his love for us in this. While we were still sinning, Christ died for us.

1 Corinthians 15:3 says that “Christ died for our sins.” 2 Corinthians 5:21, perhaps my favorite verse in all of Scripture, said that “God made him who knew no sin, Jesus, so that in him we” – and I – might become the righteousness of God.” Luther calls this “the great exchange.” My death for his life, my sin for his righteousness, my condemnation for his salvation. My failure for his success. My defeat for his victory.

1 Peter 3:18 says it this way. “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.” Jesus died on the cross as a substitute suffering your penalty in your place to bring you to God and to bring God to you. 1 Peter 2:24 says it this way. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. By his wounds we have been healed.”

There is nothing more important than the death of Jesus. It is literally the crux of human history and the crux of our faith. Without Jesus there is no forgiveness of sin. Without Jesus there is no eternal life. Without Jesus there is no relationship with a good, holy, just living God.

So I must tell you the story of Jesus life, particularly the last week of his life. Jesus was 33 years of age, one year younger than I am. He was a fit man in good shape. He worked as a carpenter. Throughout the course of his ministry, he walked hundreds of miles. He was a man in good shape, in the prime of his life, strong and young and vibrant like many of you men.

Approaching his death, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. This finds its origins back in the book of Exodus, the second book of your Bible. God's people were enslaved to a tyrant in Egypt named Pharaoh. God wanted them to be liberated so that they could worship him freely and return to their promised land.

And so God sent a succession of plagues and judgments upon Egypt and its rulers in an effort to give them an opportunity to repent, and they never did. So then God declared that he would kill the firstborn male son in every household that didn't love him as the most severe and final judgment he could mete out.

The only way to be spared this terrible fate of death was to slaughter an animal, which was the leading forth to Jesus who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. His cousin John declared to take that blood in faith and to put it over the exterior doorposts of your home so that God would literally pass over your house, that his wrath and justice would be averted, that your son would not die.

And on that night everyone died except for those – death came to every home, I should say, except for those homes which in faith shed blood of an animal and in faith put it over the doorpost of the home. They were then liberated. They returned home, and from that point forward, God's people celebrated the Passover.

If you were raised in a Jewish home, you celebrated Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. You celebrated the Passover. All of that was for Jesus. The Passover was celebrated every year. The Jews had strict order of events for that meal and certain things to be served and not served and certain things to be said and not said. And it was sacred, and you did not adjust it in any way.

Jesus did. Celebrating the Passover – we now know it as the Last Supper – with his disciples, Jesus varied from tradition Jewish Passover statements. He took the cup filled with wine, and he said, "This is my blood," the blood of the New Covenant, the one that Jeremiah talked about. Jesus promised that he would shed his blood, that he would be the firstborn son of God that would die, that through the shedding of his blood, our sins would be covered, and the wrath of a holy, righteous, just, good God would literally pass over us. And the disciples were astonished that Jesus would change over a millennium of history and tradition.

It was at that meal that Judas Iscariot, who had been one of the 12 disciples but had been stealing from Jesus' ministry for many years, he purposed in his heart to contribute to the murder of Jesus. The Bible says that Satan entered into his heart, and he left the meal.

Jesus went with his disciples to a garden called Gethsemane. It was at that place that Jesus begged them to stay awake and to intercede in prayer. Jesus rarely asked them for anything, and the moment that he did, they failed him just as we do. And they kept falling asleep, and Jesus went it alone. And he was up all night sleepless in anguish and torment. The Bible records to the degree that he was literally sweating blood. Medical doctors will tell you this only happens to those people who are suffering the most extreme emotional and psychological trauma.

Under the cover of darkness came Judas Iscariot. With him were Roman soldiers. He betrayed Jesus with a kiss. He did it for 30 pieces of silver in fulfillment of the prophecy given to Zechariah many years prior. They shackled Jesus. They arrested him. Under the cover of darkness they made him walk a few miles. They ran him through a succession of false trials with false charges and false witnesses who never did agree. Nonetheless, they decided that they would sentence him to death. They did it in one night. It broke all of the laws. This was not a fair trial. This was not done during the day. This was not done in public. This was a murder.

They blindfolded Jesus, and a crowd of men gathered around him and beat him, beat him mercilessly. They stripped Jesus naked in shame, disgrace, and John 19:1 simply says, "And they had him scourged." Scourging was so horrifying that many died just from the scourging. They would strip a man naked. They would shackle his arms above his head. A Roman executioner would come up behind him to deliver multiple blows.

The Jews would only allow 40 lashes. The Romans had no such mercy. It was a cat of nine tails that was used. It's essentially a whip with strands and straps of leather coming forth. At the end of each were heavy metal balls that as they beat the prisoner, it literally tenderized the back like meat so that then the many hooks made of either bone or metal could then sink into the human flesh. The executioner would give it a nice tug to make sure that all of the hooks had found flesh into the back and into the legs, into the skin and into the bones and the joints.

Then he would take two hands, and he would rip it off the back of the prisoner searing all the flesh right off the body, taking muscle with it, tendon, ligament, occasionally ripping a rip right out of the side of a man. This happened over and over and over to Jesus, across his back, across his legs. He was a bloodied, unrecognizable mess. Isaiah the prophet declared that he would be marred beyond human likeness.

Jesus was in shock physically. He was in trauma. He was dehydrated. He had been up all night. He was exhausted. He had been beaten. He was scourged to the point of death. He was a naked, bloodied, unrecognizable man. To further mock him, they put a crown of thorns many inches deep into his head 'cause he said he was the King of Kings. Blood flowed from that crown into his eyes, into his hair, which matted.

In further mockery, they put a robe on him mocking him as a king. It served like a bandage or gauze would. It seeped into the deep wounds in his back. The skin was just like ribbons fluttering in the wind. There was nothing left. This robe went upon his exposed back. The blood seeped into it. They let it remain on Jesus until it was affixed to his wounds, and then they ripped it off him for further torment, not unlike a man who has been through a brutal and severe trauma coming out of surgery just without anesthesia to have all the gauze ripped off his body so he could be beaten again.

They then handed Jesus his cross, which likely weighed over 100 pounds. It was not a new cross. It was a recycled cross. Wood was so rare that each man didn't get his own death on his own cross. That would be too dignified. This cross was already covered with the blood of other men, already had nail holes in it from other executions. They handed it to Jesus, and they laid it across his bloodied, raw, open back. It was a rugged cross with splinters

deeply penetrating into what was left of his back and legs. They told him to carry it to his own place of execution. Jesus was so traumatized, so tired, so beaten, so bloodied that he could not carry it on his own despite his health and his youth and his strength. So they appointed a gentleman named Simon from the town Cyrene to assist him.

When Jesus got to his place of crucifixion, they ripped out his beard. They spit on him. They mocked him. They took spikes between five and seven inches long, and they literally nailed him to a wooden cross through his hands, which included the wrists, and his feet, the most sensitive nerve centers of your body, to where every breath and every movement would be most excruciating.

They stood his cross aright, and they dropped it in its hole. Above him, they nailed a sign of mockery. "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" because Jesus said he was King of Kings and Lord God Almighty. And Jesus' breathing at this point became very heavy and very labored, and Jesus was in the process of dying. And it was at this point that a criminal would generally seek revenge.

They were so bloody and so angry and so tormented that some men became incontinent and literally just crapped all over their cross and themselves, and at the bottom the foot of the cross would often be a pile of feces and blood and sweat and tears and flesh. Because they were naked and embarrassed, some men would urinate all over the crowd that was mocking them. Others would spit on them and curse them and swear at them, but not Jesus.

Isaiah says that like a lamb going in for a shearing, he was silent. He didn't utter an unkind word. He didn't curse anyone. He didn't respond to evil with evil. And even though his breathing was labored as his lungs were struggling to breathe, he would have to push himself back up off of the spikes through his feet just to cause his lungs to expand so that he could breathe yet again, Jesus did say seven last statements from the cross. They're the last words of Jesus before his death.

The first is simply this. Jesus looked down at the crowd that was jeering him and mocking him and spitting on him, delighted in this horror, and here's what he said. "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." Jesus knew that in a moment he was going to die for sin and sinners, make atonement for sin. Because of that, Jesus Christ can forgive sin. He alone can forgive sin. Jesus knew that some that were gathered there that day, that they were going to have a change of heart, that they were going to later repent of what they had said and done and that he was dying for their sins, including the sin of murdering God.

The good news is, friends, there is no sin that Jesus cannot forgive. If you repent, there is no sin that Jesus will not forgive. If under those circumstances Jesus could forgive his enemies for such a despicable deed as that, then there is forgiveness for you as well.

His next statement was to the thief who was crucified at his side. That man looked at Jesus and said, "I'm a sinner. You're not. I'm a bad man. You're a good man. I deserve to be here. You don't deserve to be here. Will you forgive me, Jesus? Will you save me? Will you be my God? Will you love me? Will you help me?" What did Jesus say to that man? "Today, just a few minutes, friend. Just a few minutes. Today you'll be with me in paradise." See, that man got it right. He was a sinner. He confessed his sin to Jesus, and Jesus forgave him and promised him eternal life.

It's the same today because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. And anyone who would come to Jesus and repent of sin, he will forgive them and give them eternal life, take them to paradise too. Jesus in a moment was to die for this man's sin, and so he forgave him.

Jesus' third word from the cross was to his mother, and for those of you who are mothers, perhaps this one is most troubling. As Jesus was being crucified, he looked down and he saw his mother Mary at the foot of his cross looking up at her son, undoubtedly weeping bitterly, incapable of even breathing. This was her firstborn son. Like every mother, when he was born, she would've counted for ten fingers and ten toes, and here they were with spikes through them.

And Jesus looked down at his mother and nearby was his dearest friend John, who was like a kid brother to him and the leader of the disciples, the one who later went on to write 1, 2, 3 John, the Gospel of John, the book of Revelation, the only disciple who didn't get murdered. They tried, but he lived.

He looks at his mother and he said to his mother, "John will be your son. He will love you. He's a good pastor. He'll pray for you and care for you." And he looked at John and he said, "Now this is your mom. You love her like I love her." Woman, here is your son. John, here is your mother.

And Jesus' first three statements have nothing to do with himself, altogether selfless. He's thinking of sinners who need to be saved. He's thinking of the thief who is near death. He thinks of his mother who is heartbroken. And then he speaks of himself. His fourth statement is, "I'm thirsty. I'm thirsty." This shows that Jesus was altogether human. He was and is God. That's true, but in becoming a man, Philippians 2 says that he laid aside some of his rights to deity and he lived a human life like we do.

Luke 2:42 says that he grew in wisdom and stature and favor with men and God. He grew up like us. He got hungry like us. He got thirsty like us. He was tempted like us. He suffered like us. He died like us. He was fully human.

Some of you in an effort to avert the horror of the cross, you play this game in your imagination where he took on deity at that moment, and he was totally God, and it really didn't hurt, and it really wasn't awful, and it wasn't as bad as we make it out to be. That's not true. He was fully man. He felt what you would've felt. He suffered as you would suffer, and he died as you would die because he is a substitute.

His fifth statement. He quotes Psalm 22:1 because Jesus is a Bible teacher till the end. He looks up, and he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That was his spiritual death. I'll pour some spiritual meaning into that moment. Hundreds of years prior, Isaiah the prophet declares this in Isaiah 53:6, "We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way." We do whatever the hell we want. "And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity or the sin of us all."

2 Corinthians 5:21, "And God made him who knew no sin to become sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Friends, at that moment, Jesus Christ, who was sinless, perfect God who became a man took upon himself our sin. Those of you who are here today need to personally understand the depravity of this event and the love of God in Christ.

For those of you who have molested a child, at that moment Jesus became a pedophile. For those of you who have fornicated, at that moment Jesus became a pervert. For those of you who have lied, Jesus at that moment became a liar. For those of you who stole and steal, Jesus became a thief. For those of you who have committed adultery, Jesus became an adulterer. For those of you who have worshiped false gods and false religions, Jesus became an idolater. Jesus became your sin.

At the moment, he was the most disgusting, vile, vulgar, horrifying, depraved, despicable thing in all creation. At that moment, there was nothing in all of creation that was as ugly and as horrible and as defiled and debased and disgusting as Jesus Christ. As ugly as our sin is, it is all layered upon him, one after the other. Jesus was so disgusting, so despicable that the Father and the Spirit literally turned their back on the Son. Like Habakkuk says, God is too just and righteous and holy and pure and good to look upon such evil as Jesus. God the Son.

And Jesus says, "God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus in that moment was making atonement for our sin. Paul says it this way in Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming accursed for us. For it is written." He quotes Deuteronomy 21:23, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." Jesus Christ became sin. Jesus Christ became cursed, and that eternal unbroken, loving communion between God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit was momentarily severed as Jesus took our place and by God's grace we took his.

At that moment, the wrath of God was satisfied. The justice of God was met. The holiness of God was respected, and Jesus Christ became the ugliness of all of our sin, one layer upon the next, past, present and future. All that we have done that was wrong, all that we have failed to do which is right, every thought, word and deed that is contrary to the laws of a good, holy, righteous, pure God on Jesus. And it was at that moment, not in the subjectivity of our feelings, but in the objectivity of the cross that children of God were saved, that their sins were made to be atoned for.

Jesus' final two words. His first is one of triumph and victory. The Bible declares that it was spoken in a loud voice. Jesus simply cried out, "It is finished!" And his work was done. Our substitute died in our place, made atonement for our sins. Jesus Christ hung on a cross and was cursed for us in our place. God demonstrates his love for us in this. Jesus Christ died for us sinners, and it was finished.

Some of you have been told that after his death Jesus went to hell, that he suffered there for three days, that he was tormented by Satan and demons. He didn't. It was finished. It was done. He said he was going to paradise, not hell. The early apostles' creed got it right. The adjustment later got it wrong. I love Martin Luther, but he got it wrong too. When Jesus said it was finished, it was finished. When he said he was going to paradise, he was going to paradise.

And then Jesus uttered his final statement before his death. I see it with his eyes upward. I see it with his head held high in triumphant victory. I see it with a smile on his face. I see him pushing himself up off of the spikes in his feet getting his last deep breath to simply say with great exasperation, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." And Jesus was reconciled to the Father, and we who are in Christ were reconciled to the Father. And the Bible then declares that at that moment Jesus Christ breathed his last, and he died.

Islam teaches that he didn't die. We're not Muslims. We're Christians. There is a difference. Jesus died. Jesus died. And there is something in you that now will want to have pity on Jesus. You will want to feel sad for him. You will want to take pity on this poor, dying, bleeding man. Let me beg you to resist that because that is condescending and disrespectful.

Jesus said in the 10th chapter of John's gospel to his disciples, "No one takes my life. I lay it down, and I pick it up." Jesus Christ is no pure victim. He's a man on a mission to love us and save us. That's why Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set out before him." The joy. Circle that in your Bible when you get home. "The joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, to sit down at the right hand of the Father."

On the cross, Jesus was not just some pathetic victim. He was a man on a mission to glorify the Father in Heaven and to save people on the earth, and on the other side of the cross there was joy. He laid down his life. He would take it up again. He knew that on the other side of the cross he would return to his throne in Heaven and that he would save you and I.

If a prisoner took too long to die, they would break the prisoner's legs so that he or she would slump and asphyxiate. They went to inspect Jesus' body. Psalm 34:20 promised that none of his bones would be broken. Because Jesus was already dead, they didn't need to break his legs. Not one of his bones was broken.

To ensure his death, a professional executioner took a long spear, shoved it up through his side, right into his heart sac. Out flowed blood and water, assuring his death, that Jesus literally died of a broken heart. At that moment, the Holy of Holies where the presence of God dwelt on the earth, which was surrounded with a thick curtain that kept people from the presence of a holy, righteous and good God, that curtain was torn from top to bottom, and the presence of God was unleashed on the earth for people because now Jesus had taken away the barrier of sin.

Darkness came over the land. Unlike many, Jesus was given a proper, dignified burial. He was buried in the tomb of a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, in accordance with a prophecy given hundreds of years prior in Isaiah 53, that he would be buried in his death with the rich in their tomb. Jesus' body went into the grave, and his spirit went down into paradise.

Paradise was that place that the Old Testament saints who loved Jesus and were waiting for him, that's where they went when they died – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Gideon. Everyone in the Old Testament that loved Jesus – Ruth and Boaz – everyone in the Old Testament that loved Jesus and was waiting for him to atone for sin and open Heaven, the went to paradise.

Peter says that Jesus went down to that place, and for three days he told them of his life and his death and his burial and his resurrection, and he told them of his victory, that soon he would rise and that their salvation would be complete and their faith was not in vain.

Luke 16 records it on the other side of that place was that place of torment and death for unbelievers who died not loving, not serving, not obeying, not adoring Jesus. And they heard of the victory of Jesus as he proclaimed it to his friends, and they had no opportunity for salvation because Hebrews 9 says, "It is appointed once for you to die and then for judgment." There is no second chance after the grave.

Three days later Jesus rose from death. He took off the approximately 100 pounds of burial wrappings. He folded them up neatly, set them down. He rolled back an enormous stone that covered his grave, and on the feet that had previously been pierced, he walked the few miles into town. This isn't a man who just endured death. He conquered it.

When he got into town, he spent upwards of 40 days walking around publicly testifying so that people could see his wounds, that he really had conquered sin and death and Satan. He really is the only man who has ever beat the grave. He really is the atoning sacrifice for all who would come to him and repent in faith. It's really him. He really was the way, the truth and the life, and no one gets to the Father but by him. He proved it for 40 days. His enemies, his family, many people believed in Jesus, worshiped him as God.

The early Christians stopped worshiping on Saturday, the Jewish day of worship, and they moved it to Sunday. That's why we're here on Sunday. It's the day of Jesus' resurrection. After he was finished testifying and demonstrating, the Bible records that he ascended back into Heaven in the opening chapter of the book of Acts. Ephesians says that he took the captives with him, everybody that was in paradise that was waiting for him to come, they went with him. And now Paul says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When you die, you go to paradise too just like the thief. The paradise is with Jesus. It's silly to have any concept of Heaven without Jesus. Jesus is Heaven.

Jesus then sent the Holy Spirit through the preaching of his sermon by Peter at the day of Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit came. Thousands were saved. The church was born, and the story of the good news of the death of Jesus, the gospel, went out through the earth. Now for 2,000 years, this great story has been told. This true story of Jesus has been told, the crux of human history, the crux of our faith, the most important man with the most important event that has ever occurred.

I was in college. I was 19 years of age, and a lovely young woman gave me this Bible, and I was reading it, and I realized that I was a sinner, and I realized that Jesus Christ died not just for the sins of the whole world, which is true, but like Paul says in Galatians 2:20, that Jesus loved me, that he gave himself up for me, that he died for me.

He took out my heart of stone. He gave me a heart of flesh. He took out my depraved mind. He gave me a renewed mind. He took out my old nature. He gave me a new nature. He made me a Christian. I'd been born physically, but I'd never been born spiritually, and I was born again.

God spoke to me. He said marry that woman. Preach that Bible. Go to Seattle and start a church. This is our ninth birthday as a church. God has been exceedingly good to us. We started with a Bible study in my living room. We're one of the fastest-growing churches in the United States of America, one of the largest churches in the history of the state.

The only reason that we are here is that Jesus Christ died for this church. Ephesians 5:25 says that Jesus died for his church. The only reason we are here is because of the cross of Jesus Christ, and on his behalf I must tell you this point. With all the love that is in my heart that I am gravely worried for many of you because some of you here today, you do not love Jesus. You do not belong to Jesus. You do not worship Jesus. You are not friends with Jesus.

You continue in sin, and some of you have the audacity to come up with a false god, another god, a mythical god, a fairy tale that somehow you will get to Heaven despite the cross, that you will make it to God in a way other than the cross, that you will stand before God and tell him what a good person that you were and all the nice things that you did and that you think that there is another religion, that you think that there is another God, that you think there is another hope, that you think that there is another salvation. There is no name under Heaven by which you can be saved than Jesus.

I am worried. I am worried for some of you and what you did last night. You have no sense of urgency. No sense of passion. When you look at the cross of Christ, you realize two things. Either he died for you or you will suffer like that. I promise.

For God so loved the world. This is love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him." Do you believe in him? "Will not perish but have eternal life." The flip side is if you don't believe, you will perish. I know some of you say I don't wanna hear about wrath and anger and justice and holiness and Hell. I don't wanna be a false prophet preaching a false gospel, giving a false hope as a false teacher. This is our ninth birthday. I love you with all my heart. What we need more than birthday cake and a pat on the back is Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins according to the Scriptures. What we need more than self-esteem and self-actualization and self-help is we need Jesus. What the least church city in America needs is people who take the death and resurrection of Jesus seriously as good news for them and leave here filled with the Holy Spirit with good news to tell.

Friends, we're not just about a big show or a big church or a cool event or a great band. We're like Paul. We're about nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. That's what we are about. And faith is the ceasing of looking to yourself, and it is the trusting in Jesus and focusing on him, giving your sin

to him, your life to him, your eternity to him, your death to him, your hopes, your dreams, your fears to him, and being reconciled to God the Father through God the Son by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

I beg none of you to leave here today as enemies of God, too smart to go to Heaven, too good to go to Heaven, too proud to go to Heaven, too self-sufficient to go to Heaven. Revelation 14 says this, that if you do not have faith in Jesus, you'll be tormented forever in the presence of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God and his holy angels. Either Jesus died for you or you will suffer like that forever. Those are the choices. He said, "I am the way, the truth, the life. No one gets to the Father but by me." But by me. Friends, there is no hope apart from the cross. Your sins are real. God's wrath is real. Hell is real. And so is the forgiveness of sin through the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Amen.

I'm gonna pray. If you're not a Christian, you should become one now. You should in your seat talk to Jesus. Tell him you are sorry for your sins, thank him for his death, burial and resurrection, ask him to save you from the fate that he suffered, and he will.

For those of you who are Christians, I want you to still confess your sins to Jesus, and all who have confessed their sins to Jesus can come forward for communion, which was remembering his body and blood shed for the forgiveness of our many sins. We'll give our tithes and offerings so that the good news continues to go out. If you're a visitor or non-Christian, don't give. You're our guest.

Then we're gonna sing and we're gonna celebrate. Why? Because we could pray and through Jesus it gets to the Father. We can sing and through Jesus it gets to the Father. We could confess and repent and through Jesus it gets to the Father. And like Paul says, now our life is hidden in Christ, and one day we will see him face to face and we will experience paradise.

Lord Jesus, thank you so much for the cross. We echo the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:2. We seek to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. Jesus, I pray the prayer of Romans 1:4, 16. May we not be ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of anyone and everyone who would believe it.

Jesus we echo the words of Paul in Galatians 6:14. May we boast in nothing but the cross. And God, our deepest fear is like Paul stated in Philippians 3:18, that some of us would live as enemies of the cross, just continuing in sin and spirituality and false gods and moralism and self-righteousness, which is so dishonoring to you.

Jesus, we ask that you would send the Holy Spirit today to save us from ourselves and that your cross would be the crux of our life and our death and our resurrection. Amen.