

No Greater Love-Part 11
The Final Payment
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Well, like many of you, I assume like many of you, I received a good number of gift cards for Christmas this year. And they ran the gamut all the way to like \$5 to Del Taco, which I can fully appreciate, I can do lunch on five bucks, to some of you kind of went all out this year. A couple of really nice gift cards to a couple of upscale places. I appreciated that. That was awesome. Every now and then I'll get a gift card and I don't know where it's to. You ever get those? To some weird place I'd never been to, you're stretching my palate, pushing me out from Del Taco. I understand what you're doing but I don't know what this place is. And some I'll get a gift card and it doesn't say how much it's worth. Do you ever get those? You are like, what is this worth? Now I've learned through experience you don't just throw those cards aside because you never know. You never know they might be worth a lot and the place that you don't think is that good may be great because not knowing the value of something certainly does not determine how valuable it is and not understanding the benefit or the value of something in terms of its benefit to you, it certainly doesn't have anything to do with how massively beneficial it might be and how much you might enjoy it.

I thought of that when I thought of the passage I'm preaching on this week because I think so many people look at this scene of Christ's purpose for his coming. He says this, "I came to give my life as a ransom for many." Born in the manger to go to the Cross. That was the way, the focal point of the ministry to get to the Cross so that he could, as he says there in Matthew 20:28, "To give his life as a ransom," a payment, "for many." And that payment, people don't know really how valuable that payment is. The concept of the Cross is ubiquitous. Everyone, I mean, I see it every day, don't you? You get some reminder of Christ going to the Cross because people are wearing it as jewelry around their neck. You will see it on, of course, you know, a lot of church buildings. It will be plastered on the buildings. It'll be, even today, you'll see it on bumper stickers, you know, the image of the Cross. If you go to a cemetery and you're certainly going to see emblems of the Cross and, you know, headstones that have the Cross on it. You can't get away from that imagery.

And speaking of that, by the way, the cross at a cemetery, there was a cross, a 14-foot-high bronze cross at a cemetery in Little Rock, Arkansas, that had been there for over 80 years. Back in the 1930s when this was built, even back then, it was valued to be a piece of art that was worth over \$10,000 in those 1930s dollars. I mean that was a great piece of artwork. The only reason I know about this is because it was in the news lately because some thieves had in the middle of the night come and backed their truck up and had stolen this big heavy 14-foot tall bronze cross. And the interesting thing about them stealing this cross, the police investigated it all and they found out that these thieves ended up just chopping it into pieces and selling it as scrap metal, as bronze. Right? They had no idea the value of this cross. The cross, of course, as a work of art could have been worth, I mean who knows, hundreds of thousands of dollars. But the cops said they probably got less than \$500 for the scrap metal that they ended up chopping it up and selling it for.

Certainly didn't understand the value of the cross. Which poetically certainly what I'm concerned about when people have crosses around their necks or crosses on their buildings or crosses on their bumper stickers, I mean, I'm all for remembering the Cross. But the idea of the value of that we need to stop and assess it, how profoundly valuable it is, knowing the value and appropriating the value and the benefit of the Cross. I mean, the difference, of course, I hope you know this coming to church on a Sunday morning, it's the difference between heaven and hell, clearly. But it's more than that. If you are truly a genuine Christian, it's the difference between how you live your Christian

life. It's the difference between, even the connection that you sense and have with the living God, is how you understand that Cross. What is the value and the benefit of Christ giving his life as a ransom? How valuable is that ransom? That'll make all the difference in the world in your Christian life.

So I want to turn you to the really the apex of the story of Christ dying on a cross, that's where we've reached in our verse by verse study of Luke, and I want to look at these verses in Luke Chapter 23. Grab your Bible if you haven't already, look at this, call this passage up, verses 44 through 49. We're just going to take a look at these few verses here, six of them, and try and get this sense of what God is trying to do, punctuating with an exclamation point, here is the value of Christ dying on the Cross. Here is the value of the ransom that Christ paid, the payment.

Let's take a look at this. I'll read it for you. These six verses, Luke Chapter 23 verses 44 through 49 from the English Standard Version. It reads like this: "It was now about the sixth hour." I guess I got a comment along the way because the sixth hour doesn't help us much if we don't understand the Jewish reckoning of time in the ancient world, it started at 6, that was the beginning of the day for them. So the sixth hour was 12 noon. They're giving you a time marker, not because this is when the crucifixion started. According to Mark 15 verse 25, it started at 9:00 in the morning. So we've already had the drama and the horror of the Cross going on for three hours, but now we're going to get a time marker at noon, the sixth hour, because the first phenomenal thing, miraculous thing that happens is that "there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." That's 3:00 in the afternoon. So from noon to 3 it goes dark while the sun's light failed. Now that's a miracle, how that work, I mean that's a big deal.

Not that I put it past God. He controls every photon, every molecule of the universe, God can do whatever he wants, which by the way this is not an eclipse. You got to remember this is taking place on what Jewish holiday? The Passover. The Passover always takes place at the full moon, that's how they reckon the time, and in this Passover and how they know to celebrated it, it's a full moon, and you got to think spatially here, but you can't have a full moon unless the earth is standing between the sun and the moon. Right? We're in between those two. To have an eclipse you've got to get the moon on the other side. We call it a new moon. And we got a line up perfectly which happens occasionally. This is not an eclipse and even if it were it certainly wouldn't last for three hours. We know that. So this is different, this is a miracle.

And speaking of miracles, here's the second one that's interjected in this narrative, bottom of verse 45, "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two." More on that in a minute. But clearly there were some things in there, the furniture in there, and one of the things that separated compartments was this huge and extravagant, certainly in Herod's Temple, the day of the first century, an amazing veil or curtain as it's called here, that separated some of the rooms, very visible and dramatic. All of that, it says, going on when Jesus was calling out with a loud voice, "Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!'" The definition of death, right there. When your spirit leaves your body, the separation of those two, you have biological death taking place, "and having said this," here's a euphemism for it, "he breathed his last." Which, of course, is the last breath he takes in his unglorified, earthly, humbled body here. Of course, he is going to be resurrected in a few days.

"Now, when the Centurion," centurion - that is the Roman soldier. Centurion, we get the word "century" from this. He's overseeing 100 Roman soldiers and, again, he's overseeing them and there's probably more than one Centurion there on a crucifixion of three criminals, but certainly he's

one of the leaders of this. He's got plenty of stripes on his shoulder. He sees all this taking place and he does something you wouldn't expect from the Roman who is crucifying Jesus. "He praised God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent.'" The Greek word here, he was righteous, a righteous, innocent person, which is a big statement that goes beyond just saying some judicial statement. It's a statement of theology and reality as we learn from Mark 15 and Matthew 27.

Some other responses. The crowd, verse 48, "And all the crowd who had assembled for this spectacle," and it became a spectacle, it already was, I suppose, to see anyone crucified, but to have it now be completely dark and then have the commotion over there, which may have been within eyeshot, ultimately, of the temple, at least you can see it on the horizon there, you've got a lot going on here, it was a spectacle. What did the people do? "They saw what had taken place, they returned home, they went back to their homes beating their breasts." So they're hitting their chest in that ancient, near-eastern sign of grief, and like this is terrible and this is not right, the injustice of it all. And there is another group, verse 49, "And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee," so Christ's, his inner core, his comrades, his team, "they stood at a distance watching these things."

Well these things and all that took place, verses 48 and 49, I mean we're dealing with two primary things. And that is the two phenomenal things, the miraculous things, you have darkness and the tearing of the veil, and then you have the response. Simple outline, very straightforward. Let's try and follow this and start with the first point. If you're taking notes, I wish that you would, pull out the worksheet. Let's give you the title at first because we'll try and understand this first element. The miracle of the darkness on the day that Jesus died from noon to 3. What is that all about? Because you read that, there's no comment. It just goes dark for three hours. We don't hear anything about it, we don't have any explanation or theological explanation. That's all we have. Well there must be something in the rest of Scripture to help us understand it. And what I'm going to try to do is show you the connection between all of Scripture as it relates to that, in the summary fashion of course, with what we see going on here, which I'm saying is underscoring something of the greatness, of the cost, of the depth, of the payment that's being paid. He came to give his life as a ransom, a payment for many. There's something about the darkness that shows you just how expensive that payment was.

Number one, write it down that way: "Understand the Payment." Christ is on a cross, as I say in the subtitle, "This is the Final Payment." What is this payment? How big is the payment? Well, darkness is going to put God's exclamation points on it. This is a big, big payment. Now, jot down in your notes, if you're taking notes, Exodus Chapter 10. Of course, if you know your Bible, Exodus 10 through 12, we have the Passover being set up. Which by the way, when does Jesus get crucified? I've already said it. Full moon at the Passover. Christ is being crucified on the Passover. This is the day, midday of the Passover, he has been hanging on a cross for three hours. He's going to hang for three more hours on a cross, dying on the Passover. That's the picture.

He was depicted in Scripture as the Lamb of God that is taking away the sins of the world. That's how John the Baptist saw him and identified him. Here he is, the one who is going to deal with our sin problem. Now in the setting up, the inauguration of the Passover, the Passover was all about God saying to Egypt, the sinful nation that had enslaved Israel, not that they were worse in some categorical way than Israel, Israel, they were all filled with sinners as well. But God said I'm going to punish sin and I'm going to do it through Moses and Moses is going to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go." Pharaoh is going to say no, and I'm going to show, through some miraculous signs, my judgment upon this people. They're called the Ten Plagues. That miraculous set of miracles through



the agency of Moses as a prophet ended up setting us up for the verification of writing the first five books of the Bible, which is always how this works. Few rashers of miracles leaving in its wake these revelatory statements from God in writing.

So that first one started with these ten plagues. The ten plagues, as we were setting up the Passover, ended with the tenth plague, think backwards now, the tenth plague, where you would take a lamb that you had taken in your home for a few days and then you were to kill that lamb, you were to eat this in haste, standing up, put your belt on and get ready, get your staff in your hand. We're going to roast this lamb, but before you roast the lamb, take the blood from that lamb and put it up on the doorposts on the outside of your house, because God is going to come and show you that the wages of sin is death. It's a big deal, sin is a big problem and I'm going to go through and take a representative who everyone's going to just wail and grieve and will hate the fact that there's death coming to every single house, the first born will die. That's the picture.

And everyone's like, OK, here it comes and then God says this which he's always said, even from the beginning when man started sinning in Genesis 3, "But I've got a solution." Now you've got to respond to this solution but I've got a solution. And the solution is, as weird as it sounds, is take this lamb, get used to it, put it in your home, domesticate it for a week, and then kill that lamb and take that blood and smear that blood on the lintel, the door post of your house, and then when I come in that judgment you won't be killed, no one in your house will be killed. You will be passed over. And so we have the initiation of the Passover. Now that's the tenth plague.

Now you know the plagues, it all started with water to blood, the frogs, the gnats, the flies, the livestock, the boils, the hail, the locusts - those are the first eight. Now the ninth plague, perhaps you don't remember but here it comes. The ninth plague was darkness. The thing that preceded the slaying of the lamb that would pay for our sins, that picture at least in the Old Testament, was now Christ fulfilling this picture of the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, and the thing that precedes the death of Christ three hours later is three hours of darkness.

If you go back to Exodus 10 when Moses is being prescribed by God to go and be the agency of this, I'll just read it for you, verse 21, Exodus 10:21, "The Lord says, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt,'" and then he puts a comma. What kind of darkness are we talking about? The kind of darkness we had yesterday when I was sitting in my study, I was preparing for the sermon, and I looked up at 3:30 in the afternoon, and I looked over, I got a very small window over my bookshelf, and I saw, "Wow, it got dark." I thought my watch had broken. Is it six o'clock already? And I realize, no, it's not six o'clock, it was the terrible storm we had yesterday. Things got dark. If you're listening on the radio, right, it scares us, right, but it's started get rainy. And so it got dark and I realized, it's just a gloomy day. I looked up and said, "Wow, it looks like it's already dark." Well, it wasn't really dark.

Matter of fact, I went to the window, I was so intrigued thinking what had happened out there, I opened it up, I didn't know it was supposed to rain, I didn't pay attention. And so I look outside and it's gloomy and it's dark, that's not what's going on when God said to Moses, "Go out, look up, take your staff, and we're going to say, darkness over Egypt." Because here's the next phrase: "a darkness to be felt," a darkness to be felt. Now I don't know if you ever been to place that's just pitch, pitch, pitch, pitch black. It's almost like it affects your hearing, it's like so dark, as they say, you can't see your hand in front of your face. It is dark, dark, dark. That's the picture. In the next verse, it happens, verse 22, "Moses stretches out his hand and there was pitch darkness." The Hebrew puts an adjective there. It was pitch black, "pitch darkness over the land of Egypt," now this

is interesting, "for three days."

Before the lamb was slain for the Passover we had darkness in Egypt for three days, a darkness to be felt, a pitch darkness. This is what's called later in our passage, a spectacle. When they had seen these things they beat their chests. When they had seen these things the Centurion said he's innocent. When they saw these things they were watching all of this, they stood at a distance, the things they saw were something miraculous, and what God did with the photons at that particular point, no matter how he did it, I don't know how he did it, we'll find out one day, he did something that made it DARK and everyone went weird. And what was that? Didn't need comment in this passage nor in Matthew 27, nor in Mark 15 because there is a clear connection that when God brings darkness it is a picture, a symbolic picture, an analogy of his thoughts toward people's sin.

Here's a passage to jot down, First John 1:5. I know many of you know this verse, First John 1:5. "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." The picture that we should paint in people's minds, the darkness is an emblem of the absence of what we need. The absence of the thing that God is all about. God is righteous, he's holy "light." We are sinful and sin is always depicted in this idea in Scripture, or at least most consistently, as darkness. The idea that you are not like me: I am holy, I'm righteous, I'm perfect. You're immoral, you're unethical, you're wicked, you're sinful, you're transgressors. Now I know we like to think we're better than the next guy and you might be in terms of how bad you could be, but we're bad off as we can be because all of us are in darkness from God's perspective. We don't have his light.

And as a matter of fact, the darkness then becomes an emblem of God coming to judge that. Matter of fact, that's a good way to put it. What is the darkness all about? It is an emblem of God just judgment. He is judging sin. He's hanging on a cross and God says, "Here's what I'm doing. I'm exacting a payment on sin." He starts to speak in those terms throughout the Old Testament, not only in the judgment in Exodus 10. Here are a couple of passages just for your notes. Joel Chapter 2 verses 1 and 2. The plague of the locust and there's a lot going on in this passage, but he speaks of judgment this way. He said know that the things in this land are going to be bad, "You should tremble the land, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near. It is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!" And I might even begin to think about yesterday, it was kind of dark. No, then he says, "Like blackness that is spread upon the mountains upon this great and powerful people." You guys are rebellious, think you can do your own thing. God is bringing judgement, and I'm going to bring judgement symbolically upon you with darkness.

Zephaniah Chapter 1 verse 14, if you want to take notes, verses, oh, go all the way through 17. I won't read all that but the idea of God bringing darkness is the picture of him bringing what is appropriate to the problem. And that is that you guys are sinful, here comes your darkness, you deserve that darkness, and I'm going to bring that darkness, and I'm going to say this is how bad I feel towards sin. As a matter of fact, the word used is the word in Scripture "wrath." And I know we use that word and we don't think about what it means, but use the synonym, "anger." God is angry towards sin. Well, what is Christ doing here? Christ is doing something on a cross to pay that penalty. God's anger and wrath towards sin is going to be settled.

Now here's a biblical word for that, if you want it, and it comes from Romans Chapter 3, Romans Chapter 3 verse 25, Romans 3:25. It's one of four places we find this Greek word in the New Testament. Here's the English translation at least in the English Standard Version. Are you ready? Here it comes: propitiation. Now that's a mouthful. Propitiation. Propitiation is a word most English translators try to avoid when they translate the Bible because they think most people don't know



what that word means, so they don't want to translate it that way because they'll picture people reading their English translations and shrugging their shoulders, saying, "What does that mean?" Propitiation.

Let me say this about modern, cool preachers and modern, cool theologians. They don't like the word and they don't like to use the word because they DO know what it means. They know exactly what it means. They know what it means and what it means is that God is a God, because of his righteousness, his holiness, he's light and in him there is no darkness, when there are people, moral agents, making decisions that are sinful and transgress his law, he now responds, he responds with a just, exacting anger toward those things. We don't like that. Because we're fine watching a shoot-em-up movie and getting mad at the bad guy on the screen. We can be mad at them because they're a lot worse than us. But when God, the holy and perfect God where the seraphim fly around saying, "Holy, Holy," when that God looks at us and he says, "I'm angry at your sin," we don't like that. Modern theologians don't like it, modern preachers don't like it, cool churches don't like it, we don't like to talk about God being mad at sin.

Especially when you use the word propitiation because that word, if you look it up in a lexicon, in a Greek dictionary, you'll find a lot of times it has the idea of like appeasing. Think about that word, appeasing. If you've done enough like sociological study, world religions study, to appease is like, "Oh, I've got to throw my baby into a volcano because I have to appease the gods. The gods are angry so I'm going to have to make a sacrifice so that they're not mad at me anymore." And that's the critics of the Bible looking at us or the really cool, hipster theologians looking at traditional biblical Christianity, and saying, "You guys, I don't want to think of a God that's mad at sin. I don't like that." And I get what they're saying because they've painted a picture of God like your jovial, jolly grandpa. And he's just a guy up there going, "Oh, you know, you guys aren't perfect. It's OK. Neither was I. Let me tell you some stories of my teenage years. But you guys, you know, I like you, your pictures are on my fridge. It's all fine. I'm not mad at anybody. Not mad at anything."

That's the Twitterdom picture of God. Is it not? God is kittens and rainbows and happy and he loves you all, it doesn't matter, I love you just the way you are, come the way you are, it doesn't matter." That's the God of social media, if you think about it. I don't mean to throw your social media under the bus, but that's... I guess the preacher last week did that for you, I heard. Right? Anyway, sorry. All right. We can edit that out. Because I made no comment on that, I just stated it. OK. Social media - God - man - angry.

Listen, if you go, let me illustrate this, you go to some place where the authorities are corrupt, and you do something on the road, you do some traffic violation, and they pull you over and they now extort money out of you, and they expect a bribe, and they'll let you go if you give them, you know, 500 bucks or whatever. You go to places in the world where that happens and you say that is an abuse of power. That's a capricious, kind of authoritative abuse of leadership, of authority. Well that's how they picture the gods of the ancients. Right? The gods are there, they have the power, they're bullies, they get angry. They're capricious in their anger. They respond. When they get mad, they can kick the dogs, so to speak, they can crush your crops, they can send plagues, they can make you sick and so you better make them happy, bring them a basket of fruit, bring them your animal, sacrifice your stuff, and god will be appeased. There will be a propitiation.

That caricature of God is not at all what we deal with in the Bible. As a matter of fact, to say that we're in a country where that happen, and I say, you know, "Come to America, come to America because, you know what, that doesn't happen here." And if you think, "Well that doesn't happen



here, that's great. That means I can speed, I can run through stop signs, I can drive through red lights and I'll never get pulled over and have to pay a fine." No, I didn't say that. No, I didn't say that at all. I'm just saying there's not an abuse of power, at least not generally speaking, I hope, still here in America, where you have authorities going by the book and saying, "You did this, here's the penalty, and here's what you have to pay." You still get a ticket. You still have to pay the penalty. There is an exacting payment and until you pay that penalty for that speeding ticket you don't have your record cleared. You don't have a propitiation till you pay it.

Now you can look at the view of the ancients looking at their gods that get really mad and you got to throw your baby in a volcano, and say well that's how you appease the gods. You bring propitiation for the god's anger. Don't make any comparisons between that and what we have in the Bible. God is an exacting God. He does not overreact. He has a very measured response to sin. Every sin that you've ever committed has a measured, just response, just like a completely ethical and moral law enforcement officer, a law enforcement officer who comes and says here's what you've got to do to make this right. That's God. He's not someone extorting people, he's not someone responding or overreacting.

Well that concept of propitiation is exactly what was foretold in the Scripture about the idea of one day bringing judgment on sin, which is a picture of darkness. And it's a picture of darkness where I will pay the penalty. The God of the universe who deserves righteousness, our sin now needs to be paid, I'm going to bring that payment. And the thing that's going to end the darkness is Jesus, on the end of his suffering after six hours, crying out on the Cross a very clear financial term in Greek, "Tetelestai." We translate it, "It is finished." But you've heard preachers say "paid in full." That's the idea. And when it's paid in full, guess what happens to the darkness? It goes away.

We get light, the Bible says according to the Sermon on the Mount, because God is a gracious and merciful God. He sends his light and his joy and his happiness and full bellies to the evil and the good. But you don't deserve any of that. What you deserve is darkness. You deserve, to make it very clear, Jesus said it this way, "outer darkness," exclusion. Second Thessalonians 1, "Away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power," verse 9. Second Thessalonians 1:9. That idea of being away from all of God's glory, all of God's gifts, all of God..., that's the outer darkness Jesus talked about where there's weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. That's what we deserve. But this picture of him breathing his last and the darkness going away is the judgment that you should have. "I'm going to point at my own Son and when he pays the penalty and he says 'paid in full'" and the Father's justice is satisfied, there's a propitiation for our sins by his own blood, by his death, by his suffering, then all of that goes away. Now he can open up light again.

Matter of fact, he can open up now, in a deserved way, that you and I get the blessing of God's favor because of what Christ did on this Cross. Darkness is an emblem of judgment. It's an emblem of his anger. It's a depiction of exclusion. But as I said it's also this picture of propitiation. And here's the prophecy, I was just thinking of the summer fruit prophecy in Amos Chapter 8, this is a good homework assignment, when Amos, who says I'm neither a prophet nor the son of the prophet. Right? He's trying to say I'm not of the prophet stock. I'm not an important person here in terms of the clientele of Israel. But you know what? I'm telling you God has picked me to give you this message. And he gives the summer fruit, the fruit has come ripe, it's ready, and he says this is like God's judgment, his judgment is ready upon his people.

And then he describes when the judgment comes to fruition, here's what he says to quote this and I'd be remiss not to quote this as a preacher in this passage. Amos Chapter 8 when he talks about

coming and paying for people's sinful deeds. "I will not forget any of their deeds." Just like God is not going to forget a single deed that you've committed that is sinful. "He's going to remember those?" Yeah, he's going to remember those on Christ, as it says here, "I will," verse 9, "on that day make the sun go down at noon and I will darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts," which were supposed to be a joyful time at Passover, remembering God's redemption, "I will turn it into mourning and all your songs into lamentation." "I will make it like the mourning for an only son," the death of an only son.

God says I'm going to bring judgment, and I'm going to bring judgment on the people, I'm going to remember every last one of their sins. It's going to get dark, it's probably like Exodus 10, a darkness that can be felt, a pitch blackness, as Jesus dies. And as Jesus dies on the Cross and Jesus says it is finished, in that mourning and that suffering, that Passover, that last Passover that mattered, it was the last Passover that ever mattered in the Jewish calendar, God said it's paid. It's done. There's a propitiation for your sins.

It's a great text in Romans 3, at least I referenced the word in verse 25. "We've all sinned," to start in verse 23, "and fall short of the glory of God but we are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ, as God put forward as a propitiation by his blood," a final payment, "to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness," he's not going to overlook sin. He's going to remember every last one of their deeds as Amos 8 says.

"Because in his divine forbearance," in the past, he's given light even though we didn't deserve it, "he passed over former sins," he didn't take them into account. But now, "It's to show his righteousness at the present time," at the death of Christ, "that he might be the just..." Right? In other words, he's not going to in any way forget any sins, he's going to remember every last lie you've ever told and he's going to pay for that and settle that. But "he can also be the justifier," completely saying you're forgiven, "to the one who is justified by faith in Christ." What a great text in Romans 3 reminding you of the great payment, the costly payment of Christ on a cross. Maybe a gift certainly to us that we're saved by grace, but it is a costly gift. The value of Christ's death on a cross, the reminder of which, the depths of which, the profundity of which is emblematic of the darkness that was just like the darkness we saw in the first Passover.

In the middle of all that, in verse 45, bottom of verse 45, we have another miracle that takes place - the curtain, this phenomenon of the curtain of the temple being torn in two. According to John 2:20, Herod's Temple..., you remember this is the refurbishing of the Second Temple. The first Temple was Solomon's but before that we had a Tabernacle, a tent, that Moses put together and when Moses was told how to construct this temple it had these curtains that were described, this curtain that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies. Well, Solomon built the temple. It was amazing compared to the Tabernacle. And then it gets destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. and they go into captivity for 70 years, they come back and Zerubbabel ends up rebuilding the temple. We read about that in Ezra and Nehemiah.

And when he rebuilds the temple the people who were old enough to see the former temple, they kind of grieved, they felt sad that it wasn't as glorious as Solomon's Temple. Well, that kind of sat and made do for 400 years until Herod comes along and Herod wants to ingratiate himself to the people, Rome had picked him to kind of lead the people in Israel. And so here he was an Edomite, from modern-day Jordan, he comes over and he starts pouring tons of money into building projects. One project he wants to make sure he pours a lot of money into so all of the Jewish people would like him, was rebuilding the temple. So he reconstructs and expands upon the temple. If you've been



through my New Testament survey or Old Testament survey, I've tried to give you depictions on the screen of the difference between Solomon's Temple and Herod's Temple. It's fascinating, it's huge, the expansion of that. It was an amazing building.

And the building had a couple of different curtains, but the curtains that it had, the one that you could see that was an amazing tapestry from the Babylonian artisans, it was constructed and paid for by Herod, but he enlisted the Pharisees, Josephus tells us, to come in and design it and they designed it a little different than what Moses was instructed to in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, it made that barrier so that people could know you don't come in here. There were some doors on the outside but there was a curtain in front of it. And we read from historians that if you took two horses, this was not in any reference to this passage at all, you could take two horses and tie them to the ends of that curtain and you could not tear it. Matter of fact, some historians say that the fabric of the temple veil in the first century in Herod's Temple was four inches thick. Talk about blackout curtains, four inches thick. And the way it's discussed, even as you entered through it, it would take several priests, human priests, to just pull it back far enough so that you could walk through it.

That veil was all about in this text, if you have the darkness speaking to the propitiation or the depth of the payment, then you've got this torn veil that's giving us something of a picture, an emblematic picture, of the benefit. Matter of fact, that would be a good way to put it as we continue to discuss this. Number two, we need to "Value What it Purchased." The benefit that was purchased by the death of Christ when he absorbed the darkness, if you will, was that he was going to tear this curtain, God was, and it says in Matthew 27 and Mark 15 that it was torn from the top down, which is an interesting feature. We don't see that in Luke depicted, but the idea is it's torn in Luke but it's torn from top to bottom, and that idea of God just saying I'm tearing this in a miraculous event. And why is that? Because the curtain was there for one reason. The curtain was there to say stay out.

If you go to some people's property and says no trespassing, no solicitors, you know, or you're going to be shot, whatever. That's the idea of the curtain on the temple. You were not to enter. You could not enter. "Well, some people could." No, you're right. If you went through the right ablutions, if you did the right sacrifices, you could as a descendant of Levi representing the people, you could have some of the priest pull back the curtain and you could walk into the holy place. And then beyond that you could walk into the Holy of Holies and there is another curtain there and you could go into the Holy of Holies, but you couldn't, only the high priest. So the most "godly," the most spiritually qualified, the high priest, one time a year, only one time a year, could walk into the 30-foot by 30-foot box called the Holy of Holies. That's the picture. And the Bible says that that access was granted because Christ was murdered on a cross.

Now you remember that old 30-foot square, by the way, back before the Babylonian captivity it had the Ark of the Covenant in it, which is now in D.C. in a big warehouse, by the way. But if you find it, don't open it, because your face will melt off. I'm sorry, we don't know where the Ark is. But in that Ark, that picture of the Ark and on the top of the Ark, Ark means box, it's just a box with some poles and it had some figurines of angels on the top of it, was supposed to be the focalized presence of God. Right? You're supposed to have the Ten Commandments, the rod that showed Aaron was picked as the Levitical priesthood, Aaron's kids, and a jar of manna. Those were the three things originally in the box of the Covenant, the Ark of the Covenant.

All of that was supposed to depict the fact that here is God's focalized, symbolic presence among the people, Israel, God's people. In the center was their city, Jerusalem, and in that center was a temple, temple grounds and courts and a holy place and a Holy of Holies. And in that, this box of

the Covenant and on the box of the Covenant we were supposed to say, God represented here among us. We're God's people. God is our God. The problem is you couldn't really go in and see it. One guy good one time a year and he only did it after all these sacrifices and he went in and said to basically, and it sounds a lot like the capricious gods of the of the pagans and it seems like that, go and sacrifice and hopefully God will be good to Israel for another year. The Day of Atonement, "Yom" meaning "day" in Hebrew, "Kippur" meaning atonement in Hebrew. The Day of Atonement. I would atone for the sins of the people so that for another year God would look at his people, even though they're sinful, and say, "I'll put my favor on you." That was the imagery of the symbolism of all of this on Yom Kippur of the Day of Atonement.

Now that doesn't seem like a very friendly thing. It's not like God is my friend. It's certainly didn't feel that way. Matter of fact, they didn't even use the phrase very often at all in the Old Testament that God is Father. Jesus popularized that concept. There wasn't that affinity, there wasn't that closeness, there wasn't a relational acceptance. Matter of fact, everything about the veil, everything about the sacrifices, everything about this building was kind of like, you know, enter at your own risk and be very careful because you and God don't get along. He's light, you're not. And there is an aversion. There's a natural hostility between you two.

The absorption of the wrath of God. That darkness being a picture of what the payment was. Now the picture is a torn veil saying, look what it's accomplished. Here's the benefit. You have access to God. Let me show you one example of this, maybe two. Hebrews Chapter 6. Turn to Hebrews 6 and look at this cross-reference with me. This is the picture, and there's a great set of bookends. They call it in rhetorical literature, the *inclusio*, between Chapter 6 and Chapter 10. These are two great passages worth looking at both real quickly. You have this *inclusio*, this picture, of God making a promise to say this: "I am going to put my favor on people even though they don't deserve it, and it's not going to be overlooking their sin, it's going to be dealing with their sin. It's going to be that Christ will settle the account, there will be propitiation and you will be fully accepted.

So the veil is a reminder of separation as we learned in Partners, our discipleship program. We memorize that verse in Isaiah 59:2, "Our sins have made a separation between you and your God." That separation should be clear in our minds. But now we're going to get rid of that separation. There's going to be access. Hebrews 6, dropped to verse 17 to get this idea. God, in Hebrews 6:17 wanted to fix the problem and this is how he does it, starts with this wanting you to be sure that he fixed the problem. "When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise..." that's us. We get to be included and God is promising that we are going to be forgiven and part of his family and he's going to like us, if you will. He's going to be able to say our sins are forgiven. "And that unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath." So God makes a promise and then he swears an oath. "So that by those two unchangeable things," by two unchangeable things, make a promise, and now I swear an oath. And then he adds a third, "which is impossible for God to lie." Both of those are not even necessary. Let your yes be yes, your no be no. When God says, "Hey, I'm going to forgive you. I'm going to include you." We believe it.

So I've got three things in this passage. He makes a promise. He swears an oath. And by the way, I stand back philosophically and say he couldn't lie anyway. All of that to do what? To do this: "We who have fled for refuge," we say we've got a sin problem, we've got a conscience problem, we got a guilt problem, "we can have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope that is set before us." The hope? What kind of hope? That I have an access and relationship with God? Yes. "We have this the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul." I'm sure, I'm confident, a hope, not to cross your fingers kind of hope, but a confident assurance of what? A confident assurance that, "I have entered



into this inner place," here it is, the picture, "behind the curtain." I've gotten through the curtain, the barrier, the no trespassing is done, "where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf."

Just like on the Day of Atonement I could think about the high priest representing us saying, "Go, please, somehow get God's favor and pray God's favor upon us." Now I've got the real high priest, a priest not from Levi's tribe, not from Aaron's descendants, but one according to the order of Melchizedek, it says in verse 20, because Melchizedek, which we're reading about in our Daily Bible Reading, is this king, who was also a priest, who God accepts as a king and a priest even before Levi comes around some 600 years later and God says that's a legitimate priest. Well, people could say, "How can you be a high priest, Jesus? You're not from the line of Levi. You're from the line of Judah?" Well he says, "Because I'm a priest. I represent you to God because I'm of the order, if you will, of Melchizedek, which there's much more we could say as even the writer of Hebrews says and yet that would take some time, and he's even a little discouraged that they didn't know all this to start with.

Now, I said there's a set of bookends that helps us with this picture of the curtain and the promise. Let's go now to Hebrews 10. There's so much in between this but let us now see how this closes. This idea of us being right before God because the veil and the barrier has been removed. Chapter 10, drop down a verse 19. Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 19. "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places..." How do you think you possibly have acceptance before God, which, by the way, put a pin in that for a second? If you want one word to summarize the darkness it would be propitiation. There is a symbol of propitiate. If you want a word to symbolize, to summarize, to encapsulate the idea of the torn veil, I'd like to use this word, "reconciliation." Two great doctrinal biblical words. Propitiation. The payment was made and it was a high cost. And then what's the value, what's the benefit? Here it is: reconciliation. Two alienated parties brought back together. In the Garden we lost it, we get it back at the Cross.

And he says this: that reconciliation to get into the presence of God, it's "by a new," verse 20, "and a living way that was open to us through," here it is again, "the veil, the curtain." Now it really wasn't just the symbol of a big Babylonian tapestry in the temple of Herod. No, the real curtain, the thing that really bought this for us, "was his own flesh," his own body. Christ died and suffered the payment of sin so that you and I could have access, full acceptance before God. "Since we have a great priest over the house of God," Christ is our full-blown representative, we get into the country club because of his qualifications, not ours, "then let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." No baptism was done ever in pure water. Right? This is a picture of the forgiveness that God brings, Jeremiah 31.

If that's true and our conscience is clear and we know that all of our sins have been appended to the Cross, then, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering," because he who, "here's the inclusio, "he who promised is faithful." God makes a promise, he says I'll justify you, I will reconcile you, believe me, and I did it through the torn curtain, symbolized through that Holy of Holies division, but really what it was that tore open our access was God's Son, his body. That's a great picture.

Now, the torn veil represents reconciliation. But if I were to stop there I would unfortunately leave the wrong impression. Though it's all true and it's foundationally true and that is that you and I have access to God. But let me say this. You have access to God, relationally. Right? Because you're fully accepted, but I can say this. Now don't throw anything at me, but you're not fully connected.



Let me just say that. Okay. In other words, you are saved in the sense that Christ's death on a cross, if you trust in that provision, that payment, you are now fully accepted. But look at all the trouble in Chapters 6 through 10 of Hebrews that he goes on to say, trust me, believe it, have faith, have assurance. You got full access to God in the sense that you are fully accepted.

Why do you have to work so hard? Because we're in sinful bodies, we make the sinful decisions, we live in a sinful, fallen world, there's all this trouble in life. Well here's the thing. Do you know why? Because we're not fully connected. Now I know you think you're really connected with God, but here's a guy who was really connected with God, his name was the Apostle Paul. And when he talked about his relationship with God here's what he said. He says right now, "I see through a glass," you know the next word? "Dimly." I thought you had a crystal-clear relationship with God. I thought that you and God were walking tight, you know walking in the spirit. Yeah, all that's true. But as Paul said later in First Corinthians 15, "If this Christian life is all that we have you have, you ought to pity us more than all men." This is not all there is.

Now there are guys pitching Christianity in pulpits all across this country today trying to tell you this is it. This is it, right now, this is it. And I'm just telling you it ain't all that, I guarantee you, this is not it. We are saved in the sense that we are fully accepted right now. We're going to have to fight our own brains to even believe that. But really the full connection of reconciliation, the true and final reconciliation, is when I am ushered into the presence of God. At that point I have full connection to God. I am not seeing through a glass dimly, as Paul goes on to say, "I will then see face-to-face." In this world you will have tribulation. Between here and the kingdom, you must go through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God. We have death, we have disease, we have separation, we have sin, we have relational problems, we have physical problems. There are all kinds of messy problems down here. If you think this is it, you've missed the point. The point of our Christianity is, yeah, I'm saved judicially, I'm saved because I'm forgiven, but I'm not yet saved. I'm still in this messed up world. I'm still in this fallen sinful body and I'm still in a place filled with all kinds of issues and problems. But you know at one day the dwelling place of God will be among men.

Here's a passage for you. We just read it in our Daily Bible Reading in December. Revelation Chapter 21. He says, "Now the dwelling place of God is among men." I should read the rest of that passage. "He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself..." Do you see the emphasis there? "He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God HIMSELF will be with them as their God." How is that? Well, a few verses later, twenty verses later, in 21:22, he says because there's no temple. There's no temple? No, there's no temple. Why? Because the New Jerusalem IS the temple. There's no temple. "Its temple is the Lord God, the Almighty and the Lamb."

See, the whole point of my Christianity is not about me trying to rearrange everything, you know, all the deck chairs on this life, trying to have a better Christian life, make my kids obey and all that kind of stuff. I mean I'd like all that. It would be good if my life went better as opposed to bad. I'd like to have comfort rather than pain. I get all that, and I pray for those things. I get sick, I pray to get better. I understand. But the reality of it is that my entire hope is in the next life, it's not in this one. I'm not living for this life. You shouldn't either. The reality of Christianity is that God in the unmitigated power and presence, to put it in the words of Second Thessalonians 1:9, "the presence of the glory of God." That's what we're shooting for. When the dwelling place of God is among people, there's no temple in the city because the temple itself is the Lord God Almighty.



That 1400-mile cube even is the depiction of a cube of the Holy of Holies where God dwells. The whole place will be like that. Why? Because God will live in unmitigated blessing and glory and power and all the goodies that come with it. I'm not living for this life. You need to live for the next life. That's the point. We value what it purchased and what it purchased right now is I'm not like your next-door neighbor who says, "Well, I hope I go to heaven when I die because I'm better than all the bad people I read about on my news feed." We're not hoping to go to heaven. We have a full assurance of faith that right now if I get hit by a car on the way home and I die. Right? Don't be sad for too long. Right? You'll get another pastor. Be really, really happy that Pastor Mike is having a fantastically real connection with the living God that I lived for and preached about. That's what I'm excited about. That's what I'm living for. That's what I can't wait for.

To live is Christ. It's ministry, fruitful ministry, I hope. But to die is what? It's gain. And even then we're not to where we need to be because I'm waiting for the resurrection of the body and then I get the resurrection of the body and I get into a kingdom that comes down, this place, this New Jerusalem, like a bride adorned for her husband. I'm not the bride in that passage. That city is the bride. I get this place where God himself, the dwelling place of God is among men. Talk about the veil being torn. It's torn relationally in the sense that I now have full acceptance before God, that's reconciliation phase one. Reconciliation phase two is the moment I leave this place. That's what it's all about and that's what Christ purchased. Talk about the benefit and the value of the Cross. That's the ultimate value.

Thirdly, versus 47 and 49. Three verses left and three groups talked about, one person and two groups as people respond to all this. That costly payment was made, a valuable purchase was secured. Now, people need to respond to it. That's what's going on in this passage. Verse 47 Luke 23, it's printed on your worksheet. First of all we deal with the Centurion. The Centurion saw what had taken place and he praised God. Of all people, the guy with a sword in his sheath on his hip with maybe a spear in his hand, you can picture the Roman garb. Probably a lot dirtier than what you see on the movies. But there he is, there to crucify a criminal. He sees it all, he sees the darkness, he hears the chatter, it's not on the horizon of the torn veil and he says, "Certainly, this man was righteous," was innocent. That's the right response.

Number three on your outline, let's put it this way, we need to "Rightly Respond to this Gift." This is a gift. It was purchased and you don't earn it. You're not crossing your fingers hoping your behavior gets it. We're trusting in the finished work of Christ, it is a gift. But just like a gift card, which they say Americans have about \$300 worth of gift cards that they will never cash in. Right? I'd read a study that said about 46 billion dollars in a six-year period go unclaimed on gift cards. So if you're in business, you own a business, issue gift cards. It's a good way to go. You'll make money on that because a lot of you won't even cash them in. Two or three of them you probably threw out at Christmas in the wrapping or something. They are not claimed.

And all I'm saying is there can be a great benefit, theologically, in the death of Christ, that a lot of people in this room will never experience the benefit of. Because the Bible is very clear, you need to respond rightly. I want to talk about the Centurion who has a, I called it a godly confession. And I know it's a godly confession, not just, "Hey, this guy's not guilty. I don't know why we crucified him." Because both Matthew 27 and Mark 15 add the fact that he said, "Surely, this is the Son of God." That's a theological statement. He is confessing, like you read over in Romans 10, that he confessed with his mouth that Jesus is Lord. And the Bible says if you do that, believing in your heart that he raised him from the dead, from our vantage point we know that's going to happen three days later, then what? You'll be saved.

I believe that this passage highlights the Centurion because he is one rightly responding to what he saw. And there are people in this room and I just got to say it, I'm not trying to play the heavy, but I'm trying to play the heavy. You're not saved. You are not right with God. You see it. You understand it. Some of you've been in this church for years and you do not want to deal with this. To you, it's about getting a little bit of church on the weekend. You are not saved. And the church is always going to be filled with people like this. You've got people who really are Christians, they know it, they get it, they appropriate it, they love Christ and then there are people just watching, they're spectators. I'm just telling you, don't get on the road, I talk about myself dying this afternoon, don't you dare get on the road. Don't even risk the rest of the service and thinking your heart's going to beat through this service. You turn from your sin and you put your trust in Christ. You look at your life and you say I could never earn it, I'm not crossing my fingers, I'm going to trust fully in the completed work of Christ. Get saved today. Get right with God. Start this new year out the way you ought to, with a trust and a confidence that you are 100% fully acceptable to God because of what Christ has done. And you know the conviction that you feel sometimes when I talk like this and it's time for you to get right with God.

The Centurion did it. I hope many of you say, "Well, I'm already there Pastor Mike." Well that's great. That's really great. But there are a lot of people like the crowds in the next verse, verse 48, and as the Centurion had a godly confession, here's the real problem, to kind of take it another level with people who are close. They say they think they got it and here's why they think they got it, because they feel bad about their sins. The crowds that had assembled saw this spectacle and when they saw what had taken place they returned home beating their breasts. So they beat their chest as this sign of, "Oh, this is terrible what happened." Now I don't want to throw them all under the bus because maybe there are some people like this Centurion who got it right with God that day. But I think it's clear that the idea of feeling bad is one of the foils of the enemy. It's one of the things that tricks us into thinking we're right with God because I feel bad about my sin or I feel bad about the fact that Jesus would have to die for me.

You feeling bad is not repentance. I know that because when Peter was up in Acts Chapter 2 and he was preaching to the crowds he said, "You know this Jesus you crucified..." When he said that phrase to them the Bible says they were cut to the heart. They had a pang of conscience and they cried out in an interactive church service, which I kind of like. They cried out and said, "What should we do? What should we do?" And you know what he said? "Nothing as long as you feel bad about it." No. What did he say? You know the words: "Repent and be baptized." He said you need to repent. You can't just feel bad. You have to move past that. Repent. And then, of course, you got to be ready to do what he said and what he said, the first thing you do as a Christian, you get baptized. It doesn't save you any more than being faithful to your spouse saves you. None of that saves you. But the idea is you repent of your sins, you put your trust in Christ, this Christ who was crucified, you let that bad feeling drive you to repentance, and then that repentance is all about, "Now, I'm all about doing what Christ says." And some of you here, you don't want to do that. You want to feel bad from time to time when you think about your sin. You may even want to feel bad that Christ would die on a cross.

I call it a guilty conscience. Centurion: godly confession, crowds: guilty conscience. I put on the back of your worksheet for your small groups this week, which by the way, commercial for small groups, it would really be good in this new year if you get involved in a small group. Take this sermon beyond just an hour on Sunday and move it into a small group. Go on our website, go out to the tables out there, find one that's near your house, find when that's on a night that you can go, get

involved in a small group to discuss this sermon. Every week, one of the most critically important things you can do between Sundays. Nevertheless, on the back of the worksheet, I will lead you to Second Corinthians Chapter 7. And I don't have time to get into all that now but the idea of us knowing that guilt and bad feelings are not enough. There is a kind of grief that just leads to people feeling bad and there's another kind of grief and godly conviction that leads to repentance and that repentance is the key.

"Well, Pastor Mike, I think I'm more than feeling bad. I really do believe, I'm like the Centurion, I've made the godly confession." Well, then let's look at his companions. If we were to respond rightly to the gift, the companions I don't think are a stellar example of that. They might be real Christians, they may be from our perspective the people who are justified, but it says, "All of his acquaintances and the women who followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things." What was the last time Luke, Bible scholars, used the phrase "standing at a distance," "watching from a distance." Do you remember? Think. Yeah. Peter in Caiaphas' courtyard standing and watching from a distance.

This is not a good thing and I don't want to throw all these people under the bus because I know it's not every last one of his acquaintances. The majority of them were standing at a distance. But I know from John's account that you had John up close. You had Mary, Jesus' mother. You had his aunt there. You had Mary Magdalene there and they were up close by the foot of the Cross. But back in the crowds and I'm assuming Peter was a part of that, again standing at a distance. You've got people who are not being put in the best light. They're watching these things standing at a distance. I would just say this: you got the Centurion with a godly confession, you got the crowds with a guilty conscience. I think companions, maybe like you and me, we can have some, let me put it this way just to complete this alliteration here, you can have a gloomy kind of cowardice. You feel bad that the world's a mess, you feel bad that this is all happening, you feel bad about the injustice, but you are just a coward when it comes to extending the meaning and truth of what the Cross is all about.

And I'm just saying timidity is going to be a constant temptation, increasingly so in our day. Would you agree this is not a very friendly environment to biblical Christianity? It's really not. I can't even talk about propitiation from the pulpit without wincing that I'm going to get e-mail about God being angry and I want my God to be happy and I want to come to church and feel good, I want every sermon to affirm. I know that's going to happen whenever I talk about sin and judgment. Any time I mention it, I get that. I understand that's where we want to be. But you and I are to leave this place and all week long point people to the Cross of Jesus, an incredible payment that was made, at great personal cost to Christ. And a value that was purchased, access to God, full acceptance now and full connection later.

And I want you to respond rightly first of all by being like that godly Centurion in the sense that you give that good confession that Christ is who he said he was, like C.S. Lewis says, "He's not a liar, he's not a lunatic, he is the Lord." That you make that confession. But now I don't want you to go to the foxhole of your cubicle or your office or your neighborhood this week and just hide out. As Paul said to even a pastor, Timothy, he said God has not given us a spirit of timidity. I love how he says it in Second Timothy Chapter 1, he says, "Do not be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Do not be ashamed of me, his prisoner."

There are a lot of people you'd be ashamed of if they came to your office and spoke openly about the Gospel of Christ. You'd wince and not want to be connected with them because you'd see



everyone looking at them funny and excluding them and rolling their eyes and making fun of them. Paul said to Timothy, a pastor, in Ephesus, "Don't be ashamed. Don't be ashamed of me, don't be ashamed of the Gospel," and then he says this: he says suffer... and I'll just read it for you so I don't miss a word: "Share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God." I just wonder if you're willing this week to suffer for the Gospel.

I'm not saying you try to be offensive, I'm not saying you try to be some kind of contrarian at your office. I'm just saying that you stand up for what the Cross was all about. You value it so much that you're willing to talk to people about the exclusive claims of Christ. We need that. We cannot have people going underground all week long. We've got to reach this county, we've got about three million people in Orange County plus, in South County a million people within reasonable driving distance of this church. There are people pushing "your best life now" and "come get your skin clearer because you trust in Christ" and we've got the real message, and so do a lot of other churches. I'm not saying we're the only one, I get that. But we got the message of the Cross, as he goes on to say, "Christ through his grace and His purpose. He gave us all of this, which has been manifested through the appearing of Jesus Christ our Savior. He abolished death, he brought immortality and light through the Gospel." This is the good news. I got a message of good news for my generation. Paul says, "I was appointed as a preacher and apostle and teacher," I'm there to represent it, "which is why I suffer as I do."

You stand up for Christ, you get vocal about Christ and it's a good time of year to think about I'm going to be vocal for Christ this year. I'm going to talk to people about it, I'm going to counsel people through it, I'm going to explain it to people. I know that you're going to have a lot of people who don't like it. You'll have a lot of people who blow you off. We're not saying jam it down their throat, I'm just saying get it out there. And you might have 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 60 people, in a row, who think you're crazy. They don't like it. Not a very comfortable climate for sharing the Gospel these days. But that 61st person, who like the Centurion, the person you do not think is going to respond rightly to it, say that's exactly what I need. Jesus Christ, he is the answer.

I just wonder. I just wonder, a hundred years from now if I come to you, was it worth offending 60 people? Was it really worth getting excluded by 60 people because that 61st person had their name written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and don't hide behind your theology. "Well, they'll get saved if God wants them to." God appoints the ends and he appoints the means, and the means are you and I speaking up about Christ. We've got to speak up about Christ. And I'll bet it'll be more than one if you keep talking between now and the time we do your funeral, if you between now and your funeral start talking about Christ, I'll bet it'll be more than one. You might hack off a lot of people in your life. But if there are 3, if there are 5, if there are 10, I'd like to go interview those 10 people who can point to you and say you weren't ashamed of the Gospel. You were willing to suffer for it.

The companions are not a stellar example here. There's a lot of gloomy cowardice. But Paul said, "I'm willing to suffer as a teacher, as a representative." "And I'm not ashamed," to read the rest the verse 12 of Second Timothy, "I'm not ashamed because I know whom I believe, and I'm convinced that he's able to guard until that Day what he has entrusted to me." He's entrusted to us a message of reconciliation because of the propitiation of the Cross. The propitiation was demonstrated by God's exclamation point by darkness for three hours before the Lamb of God was slain. Three hours later the temple veil was torn as a picture and an emblem of our reconciliation, and all of it was fulfilled that we've got a message.

A message that I think Charles Wesley depicted so well in his hymn 300 years ago and got the



church to sing. Listen to these words. "The types and figures are all fulfilled; Exacted is the legal pain; The precious promises have all been sealed; The spotless Lamb of God is slain; 'Tis finished! all the debt is paid. Justice divine is satisfied; The grand and full atonement made; God for a guilty world has died." For us, I hope this is true of you, "Accepted in the Well-beloved, And clothed in righteousness divine, I see the barrier to heaven removed; And all your merits, Lord, are mine."

That is for those who respond rightly. If you're a non-Christian it's time to repent and put your trust in the Gospel. It's time for you to turn and to trust in Christ. If you're a Christian, don't be ashamed of the good news. As a matter of fact, remember, if I can leave you with just one verse. First Peter Chapter 2 verse 9. Remember this as you leave this building. "You are a chosen race," Christians, "you are a royal priesthood, you are a holy nation, you are a people for God's own possession," purpose clause, here it comes, "so that you might proclaim the excellencies of him who called you OUT of darkness into his marvelous light." You're a light bearer in this world. Because the darkness that you and I deserve, the outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing and the gnashing of teeth has all been absorbed by Christ on a cross. The propitiation has been paid, it's been made. The reconciliation is available. I understand it's phase one of reconciliation and we're going to have to fight even our doubts in our minds, having a full assurance of faith that we have access to God because we are forgiven. But it's just phase one. We're going to have full complete connection one day. And we want more people to go with us. So let's get vocal for Christ this week.

Let's pray. God help us, as people in a day where it's getting harder, harder for us than our grandparents, I suppose, to stand firm on the Gospel. But we want to be faithful. We want to understand that we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for your own possession so that we might proclaim the excellencies of what you've called us out of, the darkness that we deserve, into the glorious and marvelous light of forgiveness and acceptance and reconciliation of Christ. God, thanks for this reminder through the darkness and the torn veil. Let us respond like the Centurion, or better yet, like the Apostle Paul, who says I'm not ashamed of the Gospel. It's the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. Let us not be ashamed this week to represent you.

In Jesus name. Amen.