



## **SECRET CHURCH** **THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

Father, we pray that, by your Spirit, you would help us tonight to realize the glory of the truths we have just sung, that we would walk out of here six hours from now with a greater understanding of the depth of love and the magnitude of your glory that is displayed on the cross. That we would walk out of here, tonight, loving Christ more and looking more like Christ as a result. We praise you. Lord Jesus, we pray that tonight, by your spirit, you would help us to see you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Good evening. You hold in your hand, tonight, the longest Secret Church guide we've ever had. This one is going to break the record tonight. It's the longest one we've had. Notice the spiral bounding. This is a first for us because of necessity. You would think that, in light of past experiences, things would get shorter, smaller, but here's what I'm thinking – you don't need to turn here, but I just want to read you a text from Acts 20:7. Just listen to this picture. I just want to lay the biblical foundation for what we're doing tonight.

*"On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'He's alive!' Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left."*

Paul didn't get it – even when people were falling asleep and dying as a result, he still doesn't get the hint.

So, here's what I'm thinking: if we stayed around here until daylight, some really interesting things could happen. You don't get that in a 20-minute Bible study. That doesn't happen. So, we're going to dive in tonight, and in all seriousness, we do have a lot of ground to cover. That's nothing new. How many of you, just out of curiosity, how many is this your first time to Secret Church? All right, the rookies around the room. Welcome, for the first time, to Secret Church.

Feel free – rookies, first timers – to copy off the guy or the lady next to you. You will need them throughout the night, even though you may be coming in late and you're kind of scattered next to somebody you don't even know. You're going to be best friends by the end of the night because you will constantly be looking at each other. Here's what I want to start tonight by doing. I want to share something. It's something I actually shared with the faith family here at Brook Hills.

A couple of months ago at the end of a series we walked through in Galatians, I shared a quote. It's a quote that I heard a preacher say at a very pivotal point in my life as a college student, and I know there are a lot of college students around this room tonight. The preacher's name was John Piper, and he said these words, and I just don't think I can improve on them. It's kind of a long quote, but follow with me. He said,

You don't have to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in the world, but you do have to know a few great things that matter and to be willing to live for them and die for them. The people that make a durable difference in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, but have been mastered by a few great things. If you want your life to count, if you want the ripple effect of the pebbles you drop to become waves that reach the ends of the earth and roll on for centuries into eternity, you don't have to have a high IQ. You don't have to have good looks or riches. You don't have to come from a fine family or fine school. You have to know a few great, majestic, unchanging, obvious, simple, glorious things and to be set on fire by them.

He continued,

But I know that not all of you want your life to make a difference. There are many of you who don't care whether you make a lasting difference for something great. You just want people to like you, or if you could just grow up and have a good job with a good wife and a couple of good kids and a nice car and long weekends and a few good friends, a fun retirement and quick and easy death and no hell, if you could have that, you'd be satisfied.

He said, "That's a tragedy in the making." Then, he used two illustrations. He's a pastor, and he said,

Three weeks ago we got word at our church that Ruby Elias and Laura Edwards had both been killed in Cameroon. Ruby was over 80. Single all her life, she poured it out for one great thing – to make Jesus Christ known among the unreached, the poor, and the sick. Laura was a widow, a medical doctor, pushing 80 years old, and serving at Ruby's side in Cameroon. The brakes failed, the car went off the cliff and they were both killed instantly, and I asked my people, "Was that a tragedy? Two lives driven by one great vision, spent in unheralded service to the perishing poor for the glory of Jesus Christ, two decades after almost all their American counterparts have retired to throw their lives away on trifles in Florida or New Mexico?" No, that is not a tragedy. That is a glory. I'll tell you what a tragedy is...

He said,

I'll read to you from Reader's Digest what a tragedy is. Bob and Penny took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida where they cruise on their 30-foot troller, play softball and collect shells – the American Dream. Come to the end of your life, your one and only life and let the last great work before you give an account to your Creator be, "I collected shells. See my shells, God?" That is a tragedy, and people today are spending billions of dollars to persuade you to embrace that tragic dream. I want to plead with you – don't buy it.

He pleaded with us not to buy it.

So, tonight, I want to speak to you – yes, to teach from the Bible – but to speak to every teenager and every college student and every man and every woman, every senior adult in this room, and I want to plead with you to make your life count for one thing, to be consumed by one thing, to be obsessed with one thing, and that one thing is the cross of Christ. I want to submit to you, tonight, that if your life is not consumed with the cross of Christ, you will waste your life in this world. It will be wasted.

## THE CRUCIALITY OF THE CROSS

That's how important, I'm convinced, what we are talking about tonight is. So, we're going to dive in, and we're going to look at the truth behind the cross of Christ on this Good Friday. You open up your notes, and you see the first page. It says, "The Cruciality of the Cross." I want to set the stage here for where we are going. It is kind of a play on words there – the crux of the crucifixion, cruciality of the cross.

1 Corinthians 1:18, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God."* It's why Paul would say in 1 Corinthians 2:2, *"For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."* Christ and Him crucified was everything.

### Why We Are Here

So, here's why we are here tonight. First, to commemorate the historical reality of the cross. This is Good Friday, and we are thinking tonight about real, historical events that happened approximately 2000 years ago. Some interesting quotes are littered throughout the beginning of your notes just to give you a picture of Christ and history. Napoleon himself said,

Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between him and whoever else in the world there is no possible term of comparison...I search in vain to find the similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the gospel. Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature, offer me anything with which I am able to compare it or explain it. Here everything is extraordinary.

It was the person of Christ, and we all know that secular and Christian scholars alike would attribute great significance to the person of Christ, but significance to the meaning of the cross; the cross is the centerpiece of all history. Robert Leighton, "The whole world in comparison with the cross of Christ is one great impertinence." Everything in history revolves around the cross, which is what we're going to look at tonight, but we're not just going to look at the historical reality.

Second, we will explore the theological mystery of the cross. We're going to find tonight, not only historical facts about the cross, but even deeper theological mysteries behind the cross, and this is where we have to really tune in because I'm guessing most, if not all of us, are at least in some sense familiar with historical facts about the cross. Also, most, if not all of us, have probably even seen *The Passion of the Christ*, and many have even asked, "Are we going to see different clips tonight?" We are not.

The reason is because these images that we have fixed in our mind, if that is all we understand about the cross, we have a very shallow understanding of the cross. There are truths here that are far deeper. This is where all of Christian theology converges together. The doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of salvation – all of these doctrines come together right here, and if our doctrines are faulty about God and man and Christ and salvation, then we'll never understand the cross, and if our understanding of the cross is weak, so will our understanding of God be weak, and our understanding of ourselves will be weak, and our understanding of what it means to be saved will drift into, well, what we've created it to be today. It's from a lack of understanding about the theological mystery behind the cross. The doctrine of the death is the substance of the gospel, and the cross is the determinant of our eternity.

I love this quote from Thomas Brooks, "Christ's blood is heaven's key." I am convinced that we are part of a church culture today that has manufactured a cross-less Christianity, and the result is – we're going to talk about this in just a minute, but the result is – I'm convinced there are scores of people who have embraced a Christianity that is minus the cross – and as a result, their eternity and their perception of where they're going for eternity is deceived because they bought into a gospel that's not a biblical gospel.

So, my challenge – really, more important than anything we do tonight – is to ask every one of you in this room, "Have you truly trusted the Christ of the cross?" As we look at these truths tonight, ask yourself – this is what your eternity is dependent on – have you trusted the Christ of the cross?

### **How We Must Come**

So, how do we come? We must come with deep humility. This is, obviously, an extremely humbling thing to dive into and study – facets of the cross. I've got this quote from Charles Spurgeon, and we're going to talk about theological mystery, but at the same time, we need to remember the facts of what we're thinking about tonight:

He stripped off first one robe of honor and then another until, naked, He was fastened to the cross. There He emptied His inmost self, pouring out His lifeblood, giving Himself for all of us. Finally, they laid Him in a borrowed grave. How low was our dear Redeemer brought! How then, can we be proud? Stand at the foot of the cross and count the scarlet drops by which you have been cleansed. See the thorny crown and His scourged shoulders still gushing with the crimson flow of blood. See His hands and feet given up to the rough iron, and His whole self mocked and scorned. See the bitterness, the pangs, and the throes of inward grief, show themselves in His outward frame. Hear the chilling shriek, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) If you are not humbled in the presence of Jesus, you do not know Him. You were so lost that nothing could save you but the sacrifice of God's only begotten Son. As Jesus stooped for you, bow in humility at His feet. A realization of Christ's amazing love has a greater tendency to humble us than even a consciousness of our own guilt. Pride cannot live beneath the cross. Let us sit there and learn our lesson. Then let us rise and carry it into practice.

That's Spurgeon.

So, we come with deep humility, and we come to the cross with desperate urgency, and if you can let me go off on a bit of a tangent here for just a second. We need to move on, but this is key. We have reduced the gospel today to a shrink-wrapped presentation – if you can

get someone to say the right things back to you or pray the right things back to you, then we pronounce them saved from their sins for eternity and move on. We have taken the very lifeblood of the gospel out, and we have put Kool-Aid in its place.

We have said, "Pray this prayer, sign this card, do this deal, and you're saved." We have used phrases to describe conversion that are nowhere found in Scripture, and it's because we have minimized the cross. We have talked about God as a friend who needs us instead of us as sinners who desperately need Him. So, tonight, as we look at these things, this is serious stuff, because the very core of the gospel is found in what we're looking at tonight. We live in a day where we say about Jesus, "Well, He is my Savior, but He's not my Lord," or, "I came to know Jesus the Savior, but He wasn't Lord." People even say – preachers even say today, "Trust in Jesus as your Savior, but you don't have to submit to Him as your Lord." That is blasphemy. If He is not Lord of All, he cannot be our Savior. It's impossible.

You see these quotes here from Arthur W. Pink,

"The nature of Christ's salvation is woefully misrepresented by the present-day evangelist. He announces a Savior from hell rather than a Savior from sin, and that is why so many are fatally deceived, for there are multitudes who wish to escape the Lake of fire who have no desire to be delivered from their carnality and worldliness."

Scores who say, "Well, I prayed a prayer, and I know I am going to heaven," but their lives are so far from God, and they want nothing to do with God. This is not biblical Christianity, and it undercuts the power of the cross. What we have said to the world is, "Trust in Christ, but He really doesn't make that big of a difference in your lives and your battles with sin and your struggles with this and that." It does. The cross is powerful enough for those things.

So, we come tonight with great urgency. J. I. Packer said, "To recover the old, authentic, biblical gospel, and to bring our preaching and practice back into line with it, is perhaps our most pressing present need." This is the foolishness of the cross. We've catered a message to a man-centered, me-centered culture and, in the process, diluted it of its power. There is power in the foolishness of the cross. What is this bizarre message for which believers in the first century gave their lives, and believers around the world together in secret churches are giving their lives?

### **What We Can Expect**

Urgency, what we can expect. We will be confronted with the severity of our sin. We need to see ourselves, tonight, in light of the cross. I want you to think with me about the Passion narrative, the scene leading up to the cross. Who do you most identify with in this whole narrative? Maybe Peter, weeping as you realize the magnitude of your denial of Christ; maybe Simon of Cyrene, you picture yourself carrying Jesus' cross with Him, for Him; maybe the women who stood at a distance; maybe Mary, who stood there at the cross, looking up at her son; maybe John, whom Jesus spoke to at the cross; maybe you picture yourself as the thief on one side or the other; maybe the Centurion who shouted, "Surely this was the Son of God," after he saw Jesus die.

You know who I most identify with? I most identify with the angry mobs yelling, "Crucify him," and I'm convinced, if we were honest with ourselves, were it not for the grace of God, we would all be right there. C.J. Mahaney says we're only flattering ourselves to think otherwise. The old Negro spiritual asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord," and the answer is yes, we were there. Not as spectators, though, but as participants, guilty

participants. Stott said, "Until you see the cross as that which is done by you, you will never appreciate that it is done for you."

So, see yourself in this story tonight. The great Scottish hymn writer, Horatius Bonar wrote,

"'Twas I that shed the sacred blood; I nailed Him to the tree; I crucified the Christ of God; I joined the mockery. Of all that shouting multitude, I feel that I am one; And in that din of voices rude I recognize my own. Around the cross the throng I see, Mocking the Sufferer's groan; Yet still my voice it seems to be, As if I mocked alone."

Tonight, we will be confronted with the severity of our sin, and at the same time, we will be struck with the glory of our God. Robert Murray McCheyne said, "The wounds of Christ were the greatest outlets of His glory that ever were." John Calvin said, "There's no tribunal so magnificent, no throne so stately, no show of triumph so distinguished, no chariot so elevated, as is the gibbet on which Christ hath subdued death and the devil."

### **When We Leave**

Here's the goal for when we leave tonight – two things. When we leave tonight, we will go to our homes boasting in the cross. We will see, tonight, that the only ground for our boasting in anything in this world is the cross of Christ, and we will see that Christianity is not about coming to Christ and leaving the cross behind and moving on to greater truths. Christianity is cross-centered from start to end into all of eternity. For all of eternity, the cross will be central. It's not just central - it's not something that just happened then or even when we realize in our lives - the cross is the basis by which we live on a day-by-day-by-day basis. You see that. I won't read through it, but Celtic tradition that basically said Christ over everything. Christ in everything. His cross.

We will go to our homes boasting in the cross, and second, we will go to the nations carrying our cross. This is my prayer. My prayer is that God would take our time together tonight, and He will fix in each of us a consuming desire to take the cross to the nations.

If I could just get your attention right up here for just a minute, I want to share with you that I have been praying that, tonight, God would call individuals from this room, and families from this room, to abandon their lives to go to other nations to make this cross known. I am praying that the Spirit of God will do that work in hearts tonight. I would simply ask that you open your heart up and say, "Christ, I want to see you in all of your glory, and as I do, I will do whatever you ask me to do. I put a blank check on the table, so to speak." Whether that means He does lead you somewhere, or leads you here in Birmingham, or wherever you live, to live so radically different than the world around us because the cross has changed us. I'm praying that the result of tonight will be a people who are passionately running after the nations proclaiming the good news of the cross of Christ.

Isaac Watts, you know him as a hymn writer. He said, "Am I soldier of the cross, a follower of the lamb? And shall I fear to own His cause or blush to speak His name?" I love this phrase,

Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?  
Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace  
to help me on to God?  
Since I might fight if I would reign,  
increase my courage, Lord;  
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
supported by Thy Word.

This is where I want to remind us that the purpose of our gathering tonight is not just for what's going on in this room. The purpose is not for us to gather together tonight, and certainly not to be entertained. There are a lot of more fun things we could have chosen on a Friday night to be entertained by in this world. The goal is not to entertain. It's to equip. The goal is not even for us to walk out of here having a knowledge of the cross of Christ. The goal is for every single follower of Christ in this room to walk out of this place, tonight, equipped with the Word of God to teach others in the nations about the cross of Christ; that you would walk away from here equipped to – in your home, in your workplace, in your neighborhood, on your college campus, on your high school campus, and in other nations, among unreached people groups or persecuted peoples – that you would be equipped to teach others the glory of Christ in the cross.

So, that's why the study guide is as extensive as it is, and there are even things that we won't even have time to get into. Take copious notes so that you will be equipped to teach others the Word of Christ about the cross of Christ. So, for the sake of the nations, stay awake. If you need to, feel free to get up and walk around and do jumping jacks on the side. We're all in this thing together. Okay? It's been a long week and a long day for many of us, so there we go. We'll help each other.

Here's where we're going. These sections are what we're going to dive into. Just to give you a little outline of where we're going: the reality of the cross, the history of the cross, and the meaning of the cross. If you had to sum up the cross in one central meaning, what would it be? From that, we're going to spring into a journey of the cross. We're going to look at four scenes from Maundy Thursday and Good Friday that sum up – four scenes along the Passion narrative that give us different angles on understanding the cross. That's the journey of the cross.

Then, we'll get to the intent of the cross. Around 11:00 this evening, we'll look at probably the most hotly contested component of the debate over Calvinism, which is the extent, or the intent, of the atonement. Calvinism, the whole five points of Calvinism – total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Right in the middle, probably the one that is most debated is limited atonement. So, that's what we're going to dive into tonight around 11:00. Solve that thing, and then move on to the effects of the cross. It's going to be a good night, all right. Here we go. It's good. Let's keep the momentum going. Here we go.

## **The Reality of the Cross**

We're going to fly through this. Basically, what I wanted to give you in your notes here is in Scripture, and it predominantly comes from Mark. There are some Scriptures intertwined here from John, but they are especially from Mark. This is basically a timeline of the cross that just gives you a picture of what happened over this last week a couple of thousand years ago.

### **The Timeline**

On Saturday, you had the anointing of Jesus. We're not going to read through these Scriptures. We're going to go through this pretty quick. The anointing of Jesus. Jesus arrived at Bethany, and He is anointed by Mary, who takes this expensive perfume and pours it on Jesus' feet. Sunday, the arrival of Jesus. This is the Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, and then on Monday, He comes back to Jerusalem and goes to the Temple. The

anger of Jesus. This is Jesus' holy anger when He comes into the Temple and begins turning over tables and teaches us much about worship and the purposes of God. This really is a foretelling of what's about to happen when it comes to the whole Temple picture the people of Israel had operated under.

Tuesday, we have Jesus teaching, and there's a lot going on with His teaching and conversations during that time. To sum it up here, the authority of Jesus, His authority is challenged, and we see, particularly, the chief priests and teachers of the law challenging Jesus' authority, and Him asserting His authority in response to them. So, the stage is being set here, and there's, obviously, a real tension between religious leaders and Jesus that has, obviously, been developing for a long time, but it's coming to a head here.

Tuesday or Wednesday, not sure exactly which, the betrayal of Jesus. This is when Judas goes to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them, and then he begins looking for an opportunity to hand Him over. That was Tuesday/Wednesday. Thursday, Maundy Thursday, we see Jesus gather around with His disciples at the Last Supper – Passover time. We'll talk about this. Obviously, just the incredible picture here is the humility of Christ as He washes His disciples' feet.

Last night, I was reading over that narrative with our boys at home and just talking about the picture of God in the flesh, washing dirty feet as a servant. The prophecy of Christ, He predicts Peter's denial. Then, the comfort of Christ. This is particularly in John 14, 15, 16. He promises the Holy Spirit. He's encouraging them. He's building them up because of what is about to happen, and then the prayer of Christ in John 17 as He intercedes for His disciples.

Then, we move into the Garden of Gethsemane, late Thursday evening. We see three agonizing prayers, three times Jesus goes aside, and we're going to look at the garden tonight. It's one of those scenes in the journey to the cross we're going to dive into. Three agonizing prayers, and meanwhile, three tired disciples. Every time Jesus comes back, they're sleeping and resting.

All of that leads to late Thursday evening, from the garden to the arrest of Jesus. Judas comes and kisses Christ on the cheek, and He is arrested there. That leads to a very long evening Thursday night into Friday morning. The trials of Jesus really split up into two categories: one, before the Jewish authorities. We see six different pictures here: three before the Jewish authorities, preliminary hearing before Annas, and a hearing before Caiaphas, which we'll talk about a little bit later on. Then, the trial before the Council. So, then at the end of that, Mark 15:1, *"They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate."* That leads to Jesus before the Roman authorities. So, Jesus is handed over to the Roman authorities, and He has a first hearing before Pilate, a hearing before Herod, and then a last hearing before Pilate. From the end of that last hearing before Pilate, we see Mark 15, *"What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. 'Crucify him!' they shouted."* We shouted.

*"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!' Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified."* This led to the torture of Jesus.

*They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked*

*him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on Him. Then they led him out to crucify him.*

The crucifixion of Jesus. We have the first three hours - the third hour when they crucified Him, put the notice above Him, "King of the Jews." What we see is that Jesus began to speak from the cross a few different times. First, in Luke 23, the prayer for His persecutors. Jesus prays, "*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" Next, the promise to the criminal, "*...today you will be with me in paradise.*" Next, the provision for His mother, "*When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved...*" John, presumably, "*...standing nearby, he said to his mother...From that time on, (John) took her into his home.*"

Then, the last three hours, where we see, "*At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour.*" What we see is the cry of dereliction, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" Another one of the facets of the journey we're going to look at. Acknowledgment of thirst, "*I am thirsty.*" Then, the declaration cry of triumph. "*When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.'*" Finally, the cry of resignation, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" *When he had said this, he breathed his last.*"

### **The Tragedy**

So, that's the historical journey in a nutshell to the cross. That's the timeline. Now, the tragedy. Some deny the fact of the cross. No serious historians really deny the existence of Jesus Christ, but many deny the fact of the cross, notably Muslims. You see this quote from the Qur'an. They deny that Jesus died on the cross.

*That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God;" But they killed him not, Nor crucified him, But so it was made to appear to them, And those who differ therein are full of doubts, With no (certain) knowledge, But only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not: Nay, God raised him up Unto Himself; and God Is exalted in power, wise.*

Muslims see the crucifixion as a preposterous idea. One Sunni Muslim scholar even wrote, "We honor Jesus more than you Christians do. We refuse to believe that God would permit him to suffer death on the cross." Muslims would say that what we are talking about tonight is a low view of Jesus. So, at this point, when we realize – especially in our pluralistic day where there are all kinds of religions, and religion is looked at as a matter of preference, and people all across our culture and all across the church today say things like, "All religions are fundamentally the same, just superficially different." - this is where we need to realize this is a core truth at which Islam and Christianity – even Christianity and Judaism for that matter – divide. It's not a matter of preference; it's a matter of truth. Without even asking you to determine which one is true necessarily, but the reality is either Jesus died on a cross, or He did not. If He did not, then we are wasting our time tonight, and we're fools to be following Christianity. The Bible says that in 1 Corinthians 15.

If He didn't die on the cross, or if He did – this has huge ramifications for all of our lives for all of eternity. So, we need to know whether or not He died on the cross. It's not a superficial difference. This is a radical difference. Some deny the fact of the cross. Despite what Mohammed said, there were those who were much closer to the historical situation. Christians and non-Christians alike reported that it was, indeed, Jesus who died on the cross.

Some deny the fact of the cross, but even for those who might accept the fact of the cross, most missed the meaning of the cross. I've got a quote here from Gandhi, "I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His 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." The reality is, whether it's Gandhi or other religious teachers, or the countless millions of religious Americans who watched *The Passion of the Christ*, there's a great lack of understanding about what's happening on the cross because it's so much deeper than an example.

Most missed the meaning of the cross. Which leads us to the reality we're diving into tonight – we all need the truth of the cross. E. Stanley Jones said, "The cross is the key. If I lose this key I fumble. The universe will not open to me. But with the key in my hand I know I hold its secret." The cross is not just an event to be discussed, and the cross is not just an image to be viewed, the cross represents truth to be believed. Truth to be believed, trusted in, to bank your life on.

## The History of the Cross

So, what is that truth? We're talking about the history of the cross here. What I want to do is just give a brief synopsis of church history, and how Christians in the history of the church have viewed the cross.

### One Term

One term, and the key theological term here is atonement. Atonement. Look on your brother or sister's page to figure out how to spell atonement. This is a theological word that sums up, "to be at one" – that's how you spell it, "at-one-ment." Did you get that? Still early in the night, you got that. "At-one-ment."

The picture is: how are holy God and sinful man brought to be one to one another, united together, atoned? What is the condition, or the price, that is paid? What has to happen in order for that to take place, in order for them to be at one? How does the cross provide salvation for man? The answer to that question is multifaceted, as we're going to see tonight, but there have been all kinds of different theories. As the Church has said, "What's so significant about the cross?" All kinds of theories.

### Many Theories

One theory – we're going to run through these quick – the ransom theory. Church fathers, from Origen all the way to 20th century theologians like Gustav Aulen, basically said, "In the cross Jesus delivers us from the powers of evil by paying a ransom price to the devil." So, the picture is that we are held captive by the devil, and God pays a ransom to the devil in the form of His Son's death in order to buy us out of our captivity.

If you've seen C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* – read that or seen the movies – this is kind of the picture. If you haven't watched the movie, you're totally out of this, but if you have, the evil witch says, "Yes, a price has to be paid to me in order for Edmund to be let go. So, Aslan has to pay me a price." That's kind of the picture that's being expressed here, and the main picture is Christ as Victor. He's the one who conquered Satan, paid the price to Satan in order to buy us out. Now, there are grains of truth here, but what we have to be really careful with when we look at that theory or think about that theory is the idea that Satan

has the prerogative to make demands of God. That Satan is owed something by God. This goes against much of what we see in Scripture. So, there are grains of truth here.

We move on to the second theory, the moral influence theory. Main proponents: Abelard is a 12th century theologian. Bushnell, some say, is the father of modern liberalism, American liberalism. The main point, they said, is that there's no necessary payment for sin that needs to be made; the cross simply shows us how much God loves us in order to persuade us to love God. God loves us so much, there's no price that has to be paid for our sins. He loves us, and so, when we look at Christ on the cross, we see that God loves us, and He cares for us. This is very strikingly familiar to modern day gospel – “love, love, love, care for,” – no picture of justice and the seriousness of sin. “No, sin is a sickness that you just need to be healed from, and God loves you enough to heal you.” That's the picture: God is love, moral influence theory.

Next, the example theory. The Socinians follow the 16th century theologian who said, “There's no necessary payment for sin.” Again, that's kind of like the moral influence theory, but the difference here is that the cross simply demonstrates Christ's love in order to teach us how to live. He's showing us an example for how we should love others. So, Christ is teaching us so we can love other people like He loves us.

Next, the governmental theory. Hugo Grotius, 17th century theologian, said, “There's no necessary payment for sin; the cross demonstrates God's justice when the law is broken in order to persuade us to turn from our sin.” Instead of focusing on the love of God, Grotius and the governmental theory focuses on the justice of God and says, not that this is a price that has to be paid for people's sin – for specific people's sin – instead, this is God saying, “I am serious about sin as the judge of the universe, and I'm going to show it in the way Christ dies on the cross.” Governmental theory; God is judge.

Next, the satisfaction theory. Anselm and Latin church leaders. This was a reaction in many ways to the ransom theory, and it is basically saying, “No, Satan doesn't demand anything from God. God is the ruler of the universe, and the cross satisfies the honor of God through the sacrifice of the Son of God.” Basically, Anselm talked about how God is restoring His glory and showing His greatness in the cross. That's the point – showing His rulership, His governorship over all creation. The good thing about Anselm here is that he begins to focus us on a God-centered understanding of the cross.

That leads us to the last one I want to put in front of you, the penal substitution theory. Basically, this was Reformers during the Reformation who took what Anselm had done, and said, “Yes, there's a God-centered perspective here. The focus, though, of what's going on with the cross is that Jesus is paying the real penalty of sinners in their place, as their substitute so that His righteousness might be credited to them.” So, Jesus is dying as a substitute for sinners.

### **One Glorious Truth**

Now, we take all those together, and we've got many different theories reflecting dimensions of the atonement, and I think we'd be on safe ground saying there are grains of truth in each one of those theories. I've listed some there. The cross is, no question, a triumph over the forces of evil, sin, and death. No question. The cross communicates the extent of God's love for us. No question that we see God's love for us. The cross shows us how to love like Christ. He knows how to love. That's what 1 Peter 3 is all about. The cross illustrates the significance of God's justice. We definitely see the justice of God expressed in the cross. The cross honors the character of God, as Anselm shows us. The cross demonstrates the glory of God, and the cross demonstrates our need for a substitute.

However, if you had to boil it down, and tonight we're going to boil it down to one central truth expressing the meaning of the atonement, and I want to show it to you in Scripture. If we had to sum it up, the cross is about two main words: satisfaction through substitution. What I want to propose tonight is that this is the heart of the atonement; the heart of what's going on at the cross are these two words: satisfaction through substitution.

## **THE MEANING OF THE CROSS** **Satisfaction through Substitution**

So, let's dive right into that. The meaning of the cross: satisfaction through substitution, and what you see at the top of the next page is 1 Timothy 2:5-6. I only put verse 5 on there, but it's actually verses 5 and 6 that are listed there. These are going to be a guide for us throughout the night. You see, Packer said these words contain "the key, not merely to the New Testament, but to the whole Bible, for they crystallize into a phrase the sum and substance of its message." So, here are the two verses that are really going to guide the rest of our time together tonight.

### **Divine Satisfaction**

*"There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."* So, what we're going to do is we're going to unpack those two verses just phrase by phrase by phrase. We'll start with the divine satisfaction. There is one God. This is key. When we come to the cross, our natural inclination is to say, "What does the cross mean for me?" We are me-centered. What's the sinful nature all about? Centered on me. Centered on ourselves, concerned about our rights. What does this do for me? The cross, no question, does things to us, for us, but it's not the ultimate question. Likewise, the ultimate question is not, "What does the cross do to Satan, or how does the cross affect Satan?" It's a part of this whole picture.

#### **God must act at all times in absolute consistency with the perfection of His character.**

The ultimate question is, "How does the cross affect God?" What I want to begin to get our minds and our hearts focused on is a God-centered understanding of the cross. A God-centered understanding of the cross that is in some ways different than the way the cross is oftentimes represented to us or perceived by us. So, let's start with this picture: one God. What do we mean by divine satisfaction? You've got one sentence there that sums up. When I'm talking about divine satisfaction, God must act at all times in absolute consistency with the perfection of His character. God, by His very nature, must act according to His nature at all times.

One theologian said – this is not in your notes there – but he said, "It's all together an error to suppose that God acts at one time according to one of His attributes and another time according to another attribute. He acts in conformity with all of them at all times." So, everything God does is an absolute consistency with the perfection of His entire character. By His very nature, He must act in this way, not by something imposed on Him from outside, but according to His very nature. When you look at Exodus 3:14, He says, "*I am*

who I am." Malachi 3:6 tells us that He does not change. James 1:17 says He "does not change like shifting shadows."

### **Consider the character of God**

Now, this is where we need to think about the character of God. Again, I mentioned this real briefly earlier, but if we have a low view of God, than we will have a low understanding of the cross, a very shallow understanding of the cross. If God is just a friend who we did a couple of wrong things to, then salvation is easy and the cross is not that big of a deal. However, if God is a majestic King, who is infinitely offended by sin, infinitely set against sin, then the cross has to be something great.

So, the character of God, an overview: Who is God? He is sovereign over all. We're going to bring in some of the truths that we studied a year ago, if you were here at Secret Church, on the greatness of God. He is sovereign over all. He created all things. "You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it." He made it all. He knows all things. Job 37 says He's perfect in knowledge. 1 John 3, "He knows everything." He created all things. He knows all things.

He sustains all things. Psalm 36 says, "You preserve both man and beast." You look in the middle of Psalm 104:24-30, it's talking about all the creatures that God has made. He says, "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust." Everything we have, everything we receive comes from God. Our whole sustenance comes from God. He owns all things. "To the Lord your God belong the heavens...the earth and everything in it." He is the author of creation, which means he has authority over all creation. He owns it all. Everything belongs to God, so He is sovereign over all.

Second, He is holy above all. God is unique. He is set apart. He is completely other, completely pure. "There is no one holy like the Lord," 1 Samuel 2. Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, both give us this picture, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord." He is holy above all. So, He's sovereign over all. He is holy above all.

Third, He is righteous in all His ways. What that means is that He is right in everything He does. Genesis 18 there, "Will not the Judge over all the earth do right?" Deuteronomy 32, "all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." Psalm 145, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways." A lot of people sometimes begin to get angry with God because they don't feel like He's given them a fair deal, but we can never say that to God because everything God does is right. Everything God does is just. He's righteous in all His ways.

Flowing from that, He's just in all His wrath because He is holy and righteous. He cannot stand sin. His justice flows from His righteousness. His wrath flows from His holiness, and we have to be careful here, because if we dilute the wrath of God, which is what we often do today, we don't want to talk about the wrath of God. However, when we dilute the wrath of God, we diminish the holiness of God. So, what I've got here are a few Scriptures to make sure we've got a picture of the fact that God is just in all His wrath.

Romans 3:5-6 talks about how God is just in bringing His wrath on us. That's following Romans 2 when Paul talked about your "stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself, for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed." God will reveal His righteous judgment, and He is storing up wrath. 2

Thessalonians 1:5-10, in the middle, talks about how Jesus will *"punish those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power."* This is a frightening reality. Ladies and gentlemen, God will judge you, and He will be just. This is a frightening reality.

What Scripture teaches is that God is indignant towards sin. Holiness cannot exist with sin. *"You...hate wickedness,"* Psalm 45. *"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong."* (Habakkuk 1:13) He is indignant towards sin, and God is intolerant of sinners. That's where we come back to that cliché – and we talked about this when we talked about the character of God – what happened to the idea that God hates the sin but loves the sinner? The Bible happened to that. Psalm 5:5-6, *"The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong."* Fourteen times in the first 50 Psalms alone we see the Bible talk about God's hatred of sinners, God's wrath towards liars and such language. This is what we see in Scripture, and it's not just Old Testament. New Testament, Romans 1:18, God's wrath rests on sin. John 3:36, God's wrath rests on sinners. This is the picture, and this brings us to our faces. You can see now why in Old Testament worship, you've got, in Nehemiah, the people on their faces before God. You've got Ezra on his face, the people in Ezra 10 weeping before the Lord, things that we don't see in contemporary worship today because it's never struck us – the thought that we might not be accepted in God's presence just because we have great music. They came weeping before God.

There's a holy fear that is there, and a seriousness in approaching God because He's indignant towards sin and intolerant of sinners. This is where we are baffled. When you look in Scripture, you think about the passages in the Old Testament and New Testament that we wrestle with. I've got them listed there. Genesis 19, remember God's wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot and his wife are fleeing, and God says, "Don't look back." Lot's wife looks back, and immediately she is gone, a pillar of salt. Death penalty for a glance. How about Leviticus 10, Aaron's sons, faulty worship, capital punishment. You do things your own way in worship, you die in the Old Testament.

Numbers 15,

*While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp." So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded Moses.*

Death by stoning for picking up sticks. It's just picking up sticks.

Numbers 20, Moses himself does this one thing wrong and disobeys God, and he's disqualified from entering into the Promised Land. Joshua 7, Achan's sin, *"The Lord will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them,* for hiding something in his tent. 2 Samuel 6, Uzzah reaches out to catch the ark when it's about to fall and immediately dies. It's not just Old Testament.

New Testament. You know Ananias and Sapphira – he comes in, and she comes in, and they both lie and deceive and, immediately, are struck down. How about that for church growth? If that happens at your church, people are not coming next week. Now, let's be honest. We look at these passages in the Old Testament and New Testament. Don't we think in our

minds and our hearts, "Isn't this a little severe? Isn't God overdoing it here? Stoned for picking up sticks? Fall over dead for deception in the church?"

This is where we realize that we think these things are severe because we have a very man-centered perspective of sin. You see, if someone lies to me or someone lies to you, you don't think, "Stone him." The reality is that it's not a matter of how big or small a sin is. What is supremely the matter is the one who is sinned against. If you sin against a rock, you're not very guilty. If you sin against a man, you're guilty. If you sin against God, you are infinitely guilty. One sin is an infinite offense in the sight of a God who is holy above all and righteous in all His ways and just in all His wrath. One sin. Think about it. It is one sin in Genesis 3 that brought about the entire picture of sin and suffering we see in the world today. Moral and natural evil, whether it is the Holocaust or shooting sprees, or tsunamis and earthquakes and tornadoes, all of it goes back to one sin. Romans 5, "*One sin brought condemnation to all men.*" That's from one sin, and you and I in this room have committed thousands of them.

This is a serious picture. God is just in all His wrath. One more attribute of God, He is loving toward all His creation. "*God is love,*" 1 John 4. Now, what do you mean? Just in all His wrath and love? You feel a tension there? Hold that tension. Feel that tension and hold onto it. That's the character of God.

### **Consider the sinfulness of man**

The sinfulness of man. Sin is not a psychological problem. Sin is not a great inhibitor to self-improvement. Sin is an infinite offense before God. We have denounced His sovereignty. That's what Genesis 3 is all about. "It doesn't matter what God has said not to eat. If I want to eat it, I'm going to eat it. I'm going to denounce His authority over me." You think about one sin, just one sin. God says to everything in all creation, He says to the oceans, "You stop right here." He says to the mountains, "You go there." He says to the rain, every drop of it, "You fall here. You fall here." He says to everything in all creation, "Do this" and immediately it is done. He looks at man, and He says, "Do this," and we look at Him in the face and say, "No. No, I'm doing things my own way." We have denounced His sovereignty. Our "*wickedness and rebellion,*" Leviticus 16 says.

We have dishonored His holiness. Ezekiel 36, "*You have profaned my holy name.*" Romans 1 says that you have exchanged my glory for stuff. We have dishonored His holiness. We have despised His righteousness. "*There is no one righteous, not even one.*" (Romans 3) We have fled righteousness into unrighteousness, Romans talks about. We have disregarded His wrath. We have dumbed it down or ignored it all together. "*Objects of his wrath,*" Ephesians 2:4. Ignoring His wrath, not talking about His wrath, it doesn't sell in our marketplace today. We don't sell books talking about the wrath of God, and we have denied His love. We've "*shown contempt,*" Romans 2:4, "*for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience.*" Ladies and gentlemen, our problem is not that we've messed up before God. Our problem is that we have denounced the sovereignty of God, disregarded the holiness of God, and despised the righteousness of God. We deserve the wrath of God, and yet, we have dumbed it down, and we have denied His love.

### **The Divine Dilemma**

This is the problem of sin, and it leads to the divine dilemma. Now, follow with me here. This is where these two come together. The problem is how can a just God be kind to rebellious sinners who are due His wrath? Look at Proverbs 17:15. This is the ultimate question of the Bible right here. Look at Proverbs 17:15, just one example, "*Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – the Lord detests them both.*" God detests those who

acquit the guilty. You condemn the innocent, that's detestable before God. You acquit the guilty, that's detestable before God. Did you catch that?

So, for God to overlook our sin – and we are all guilty before Him – for God to overlook our sin, to acquit us in our sin, would be detestable to Himself. Did you catch that? This is the question the Bible is asking us here. How can God love guilty sinners and not be an abomination to Himself? How can God satisfy all of these characteristics, attributes that are summed up in who He is with guilty sinners before Him? This is not the question we wrestle with. There's nobody in our culture losing sleep tonight over how God can be so kind to sinners. How can He be so kind to us? No. We point the finger at God, "How can you do this or this or this to us?" However, the question in the Bible is, "How can you, God, let rebels into heaven into your holy presence?" That's the divine dilemma.

You feel the tension here. How can God express His holiness without consuming us in our sin? How can He express His love without condoning us in our sin? This is what the Bible's asking us. How can God judge sin and justify the sinner at the same time? How can God satisfy Himself and save us at the same time?

You feel the tension here in Hosea 11,

*How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboin? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God and not man – the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.*

Do you feel the tension here between the compassion of God and the anger and the wrath of God? How can God satisfy Himself and save us at the same time?

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