

The God on the Cross

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Preacher: Dr. Daniel Heeringa

[0:00] You know, sometimes a passage you read, it just sticks out to you. It's almost like it's just spiritually highlighted off the page. I knew I had read it before, I'm sure many times.

Several years ago, when I read Luke 9, verse 51, it just stuck out to me. It says, when the days drew near for him, speaking of Christ, to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Up until that time, Jesus was healing the sick, he was raising the dead, he was teaching the kingdom, he was training the twelve. And something happened after that. Things began to change. Before that time, often he would tell people not to tell others what he had done. Sometimes he would tell them not to tell others what he had said. And the reason he did that was to make his ministry longer.

To have more time with the disciples. But at this point in his ministry, he reached the point where he began to drive toward the cross.

[1:12] It is a pivotal passage. And one that is appropriate for us today. And in the Sundays to come. Because we are setting our face toward the cross.

Toward the empty tomb. Toward the death and the resurrection of Christ. As we prepare for Easter. In July of last year.

Three miners were trapped underground in British Columbia. At a mine called Red Chris. It's a copper and gold mine.

There were two separate rock falls that had affected their exit. And they could not get out. They were alive. But they were not free. Now the mine had an underground emergency refuge area. It had air. It had water. It had food. It had communication. In other words. They had what they needed to be sustained for a while.

[2:22] But there was nothing in that chamber that would get them out of the hole that they were in. They could not live there forever. They could breathe.

But not there forever. Their only hope was that someone on the outside would reach them. Someone would get through what was blocking them.

They needed somebody to clear the way that they could not clear themselves. They needed someone to save them. And after 60 hours, thankfully, they broke loose, got to them, and they got out alive and saved.

When I read that story, I thought about how that is a fitting picture of us in a human condition apart from Christ.

We can survive this life without Christ. We can linger for a while, maybe for a long time, but we can't linger forever.

[3:33] We cannot cope with what's to come. We can cope with the daily. That is until we can't.

We need somebody to lead us out of the hole we are within without Christ and lead us to Christ. Let's set our face toward the cross this morning. 2 Corinthians chapter 5, beginning in verse 14 says, For the love of Christ controls us.

He's talking about Paul and Timothy. Because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

[4:43] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us, we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In this passage, Paul is telling the Corinthians that he is in a struggle. He loves the Lord. He wants to see the Lord. He's been faithful to serve the Lord. And he looks forward to the day that he can see him face to face.

[5:48] But he also wants to live to please the Lord. And he knows for the time being that that's to be on the earth. And what he's saying here is that what he does for others, he does through the love of Christ.

Because of what Christ has done for him. And thank God what Christ has done for us. The cross makes all the difference. And I want to show you the difference that the cross makes.

First, I want you to understand the motive of the cross. The love of Christ is the controlling factor in the Apostles Paul's life.

No wonder. Christ radically changed his life. In late 2014 and early 2015, ISIS militants abducted 21 migrant construction workers in Libya.

All of them were from Egypt except for one. And he was from Ghana. These workers were passionate Coptic Christians.

[7:00] They were passionate for the Lord. They loved the Lord. And ISIS was trying to force them to convert to Islam. And in an ISIS propaganda video, they lined the men up on the beach.

They announced in that setting that they were targeting, quote, people of the cross. And you could hear the kneeling men praying, Ya Rabbi, Ya Soha.

Which in their language means, Oh my Lord Jesus. The one Guanian among the Egyptians said, while they were crying out to God, their God is my God.

Shortly after this picture was taken, each man was decapitated and died on that beach because they would not back off the Lord.

Now, I want you to look at that picture. When Paul was saved, he was on his way to Damascus to kill Christians.

[8:20] The guy in the white camouflage is the leader of this group. He was their spokesman. He was their leader. Paul went from being a guy like that to being one of the greatest men of God and proclaimers of the gospel to ever live.

My friend, that's the kind of difference that Christ makes in someone's life. He went from being the one in white to the one in orange for the sake of the gospel.

He is the man that writes in verse 15, and Christ died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Let me tell you something. The motive of the cross, the reason Christ went to the cross is to miraculously save a lost and dying world.

Not only that, I want you to see the miracle of the cross because the apostle Paul goes on to explain what happens through the cross. The miracle of the cross is not that Christ changes someone or that he restores someone or that he improves us.

[9:40] The miracle is that he makes us new is what scripture says. In other words, the sin and our lack of restraint toward temptation that comes before the sin is removed by the forgiveness of God, we have a lack of restraint.

Once we come to Christ, things change. Now, I didn't say temptation's gone. It's not. What I'm saying is when we come to Christ, the powerlessness that we felt toward temptation is gone.

In Christ, we have the power of the Holy Spirit to fight our battles for us. However, for that newness to come, the old has to pass away.

Just like the picture of baptism shows us, we have to die to self. Jesus died that we might die to self than that we might live for Christ.

And when we die to the old way and to the wants of ourselves, we come to life in a new way in Christ. No longer are we shackled to sin, unable to be free from it.

[11:02] In Christ, when we lean upon the Holy Spirit of God, we're free from it. We're made new from it. Our perspective on God is made new. Now, the devil loves for us to fall back into that old mindset and think that we can't walk away from it.

But I want you to know that in Christ, we have the power of the Holy Spirit of God to walk away from it and to walk in freedom in Christ. Verse 16 says that we do not regard Christ according to the flesh anymore.

In other words, we don't worship a babe in the manger. We don't worship the suffering servant of the garden.

The cross, thank God, is empty. Don't wear jewelry with Christ still on the cross, okay? Because he's not on the cross.

We serve a risen Savior. We worship a glorified Savior on the throne of God. And it is through that glorified Savior that we invest our lives and that we're made new.

[12:04] And that changes our perspective on things. It changes our view of people. In Christ, when walking with the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God, we see people that live in ways contrary to the ways of God.

We see them in a new perspective. We don't see them as enemies. We see them as people that need Christ. They're not just lost friends and family and coworkers.

They're lost sheep that need a shepherd. They're in a hole sustaining. They need somebody to clear the rock.

They need a cross. To provide a way for them to come to Christ. And that leads to the ministry of the cross. This is powerful.

Because as Christ has ministered to us and for us, we're to minister to others. And it's called here the ministry of reconciliation. As I travel, Dawn likes for me to bring her coins from around the world.

[13:16] And years ago, I was on my way to Africa on a mission trip and I stopped in Paris for a layover. And at that time, I had never been to Europe. And so I stopped at the money exchange in the airport.

And I either gave the lady a \$5 bill or a \$10 bill or something like that. And I said, can I just get a mixture of coins with this money?

And she said, no. She said, the fee is more than you're giving me. So I took my good old American money and I left.

When I went to Europe just a month ago, before I went, I contacted my bank. And for an even exchange, I received euros in my mailbox just a couple of days later.

Now, I want you to see this. In verse 18, it says, all this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

[14:24] The word for reconcile there is a marketplace word. It's a word that speaks of someone exchanging money for another currency.

And through Christ, because of what he did for us on the cross, we have the opportunity to go from being outside of Christ, thank God, to being in Christ.

It is the great reconciliation. It is a faith exchange. Christ took on our sin and gives us life in return.

And in return, we are simply to share that message with others. We join in to a ministry of reconciliation by sharing what Christ has done for us with others.

As he did for us, we do for others. We share the change that Christ has made in our lives. Now, how do we do that? Well, he goes on to say in this passage that we are ambassadors for Christ.

[15:33] Now, what's an ambassador? An ambassador is a representative. I want you to hear me now. It's a representative of a different land.

Ambassadors live in a foreign land among a people of a foreign language, and they live a different way of life.

Ambassadors live in that land. They take part in that land, but they're not citizens of that land. Instead, they speak for their country they represent.

The reputation of their country is in the hands of the ambassador. Their words are listened to. Their deeds are watched.

Their duty is to carry out a definite message and implement definite policies, all while being sensitive to how they impact the country in which they live. My friends, I want you to understand something.

We are resident aliens. We live here, but if you're in Christ today, you're a citizen of heaven, and we need to act like it. This world is not our home.

[16:39] We need to talk like it. Let's speak as an ambassador a definite message with boldness for what we represent. God has called us as Christians to be ambassadors for the gospel to a lost and dying world, and it is the ministry of the cross.

If Christ has changed you through the Holy Spirit of God empowering you, you have the opportunity to participate in seeing other people change by the power of God.

It's the ministry of the cross. Let me tell you, lastly, the ministry of the cross. One of the great passages of Scripture and one that defines why Easter is so very important is in verse 21, and it says, for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Christ never sinned. He was not born with a sin nature. That is the significance, one of the significance of the virgin birth.

He did not have a sin nature. He never sinned. He never felt a strain between he and the Father. He never felt the weight of guilt. He never felt the dread of the ramifications.

[18:06] He never felt the anticipation of the fallout that comes when somebody's in sin. That is until the cross. And on the cross, he took on all of our sin, felt the chasm of separation between he and the Father, and that darkness that covered the earth, as Scripture tells us, upon his death, that started within him.

And he did all of it to allow us to become the righteousness of God. Ellen Vaughn is a journalist who wrote a book called *The God Who Hung on the Cross*.

And in that book, she tells the story of a Cambodian pastor who traveled throughout his providence sharing the gospel. And in that providence of Cambodia, it was filled with small villages.

And he would go from village to village. And one village he would go, they would not listen to him because they followed Buddha. He would go to another one, and they did not listen to him because they followed demonic spirits, spiritualism.

Seemed like everywhere he went, they would not listen to the gospel until he got to one particular village that received him warmly. He asked the villagers about their openness to the gospel.

[19:39] Why were they different? And a woman shuffled forward, she bowed before him, she grasped his hands, and she said, we've been waiting on you for 20 years.

And then she told him the story of the mysterious God who had hung on the cross. In the 1970s, there was a brutal communist-led regime that took over Cambodia.

It caused destruction throughout its path, destroyed everything. And when the soldiers came to this village in 1979, they immediately rounded the villagers up and forced them to dig their own graves. After the villagers had finished digging their graves, they prepared themselves to die. Some screamed out, to Buddha, others screamed out, to demon spirits.

Others cried out to their ancestors. But one woman started to cry for help based on a childhood memory. She said a story her mother told her about a God who hung on a cross.

[21:00] And the woman prayed to that unknown God on a cross. Surely, surely if this God had known suffering, he would have compassion on their plight. And suddenly, those people who had been calling on all their individual gods, all of a sudden, there became a solitary cry, just a great wail among them all praying to the God in which she was calling upon.

All of them praying to this mysterious God who hung on the cross. as they continued facing their own graves, their wailing began to slow and they began to quiet and it just become quiet crying. There was an eerie silence in that muggy jungle air. And suddenly, they dared to turn around and look at those who were there to kill them.

and they were gone. As the old woman finished telling that story, she told that pastor, she said, ever since that humid day 20 years ago, the villagers have been waiting.

Waiting for someone to come and share the rest of the story about the God who hung on the cross. Church, almost all of Pickens and the surrounding area, if not all of them, have heard of the God who hung on the cross.

[22:49] But many are waiting. whether they realize it or not, they're waiting for somebody to free their way out, to show them hope.

God has surrounded us with a world that desperately needs Christ. And he's called us to a ministry of reconciliation.

reconciliation. He's called us to be ambassadors, representatives for him. Living in a land that's truly not our home.

To send a message, to stick to a calling that God placed upon our life when he changed our life. If you're here this morning and you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, I got good news for you. He'll take you as you are.

[24:00] If you'll confess that you're a sinner and ask him to forgive you, he'll wash you clean of those sins. He'll make you new. Folks, he won't just clean you up.

He'll make you new. Maybe you're here this morning and you have done that. Maybe like James, you did that years ago, but you never have acknowledged that publicly.

And Jesus, by his commission and by his example, tells us that we need to follow him in baptism. If you've never been baptized as a believer, but you know that you are a believer, I encourage you to come. Maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church, doing a wonderful work in our church, I'm thankful for that.

Maybe God's drawing you here. If that's the case, we'll be happy to guide you in what it means to be a member of First Baptist Church. We'll stand and sing in just a moment. You come as God leads.

[24:59] Christians, there's a message that's very clear in scripture again and again.

The Apostle Paul makes it very clear, I hope I didn't muddy the waters this morning, that we have a job to share what Christ has done in our lives with others.

We have a job to live it out before them. we have a job to share with them. Will you commit your life today to be an ambassador for Christ?

To be one that properly represents the kingdom in which you are a part of? And will stay to the definite message. Stay on task.

Walk the walk and talk the talk and make the difference for Christ that he's called us, enabled us, and commissioned us to do.

[26:06] No better time to do it than as we approach a celebration of the resurrection of the Lord. I don't know what God's telling you, I know what he told me.

I encourage you to be obedient to whatever God's telling you to do. We'll stand in just a moment, we'll sing, but more important than that, you obey God.

If you need to give your life to Christ, you come. If you need to be baptized, you come. If you feel led to join this church, you come. If you need to come to this altar, you come. If you need a pastor to pray for you, you come.

If you need to pray where you are, you come. Don't do anything more than what God's told you to do. Don't do anything less than what you feel like he's told you to do. Just be obedient to follow. Heavenly Father, I love you and I thank you, dear God, for the love that you show us and how your word shows us that not only do you change us, but you give us the opportunity to be a part of change in other people's lives.

And I pray that we'll be faithful to that today. Lead us, Lord, right now to simply be obedient to follow you. in Jesus' precious name. Amen.