

Easter Sunday - "Of First Importance" I Cor. 15:3

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[0 : 00] And it really ties in with the message, or this morning, you kind of get the impression that they were trying to emphasize something, don't you?

And that's really what it's all about, and that's what we're trying to emphasize this morning as well. And we're calling it of first importance, of first importance.

And to prepare the scriptural way for that, I would ask you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 15. And you may follow along with whatever translation you have, and in reverence for the word of God, we'll ask you for those who are able, without pain, to stand, to do so as we read the scriptures. And if it's difficult for you to stand, by all means, you remain seated. All right? 1 Corinthians chapter 15. Follow along with whatever translation you have, because there are multiple translations out there.

And we will be reading down through verse 26. Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, and which also you stand, by which you also are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

[1 : 29] For I delivered to you as of first importance, when I also received that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

And last of all, as it were, to one untimely born, he appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace toward me did not prove vain, but I labored even more than all of them. Yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach. And so you believed. Now, if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

[2 : 44] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain.

Your faith also is vain. Moreover, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that he raised Christ. Whom he did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless.

You are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied.

But now, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

[3 : 49] For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive, but each in his own order. Christ the firstfruits.

After that, those who are Christ at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

And all the people said? Amen. Thank you. Be seated, please. We want to focus on verse 3, wherein the apostle said, I delivered unto you as of first importance.

As of first importance. That's another way of saying, this is at the top of the list. It's another way of saying, this takes priority over all else.

[4 : 56] This is job one. If you don't get this, you miss everything. If you do get this, nothing else matters.

When all is said and done, this is the sum of the matter. That's what he's saying. This one fact is the engine that drives everything.

Paul, the apostle, had a theological fiddle. And it had just one string on it. And he played that string. Every time he had an opportunity. And that one string was, Christ died for your sin, according to the scriptures.

Over and over and over again. Because compared to that, there isn't anything else that matters. Think of it. Sum it all up, if you will.

[6 : 02] This is exactly what it boils down to. The world has all of its objectives and priorities and preferences. But when push comes to shove and the plan and program of God, the only one that really matters, this is all that counts.

This is what it's all about. As I said, if you miss this, you miss everything. It is all summed up in him. It is all about the person and work of Christ.

If you omit this, it doesn't make any difference what else you have or what else you include. If you omit this, you've just omitted everything.

First of all, according to verse 3, I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received. Which is another way of saying, I'm not asking you folks to believe anything that I haven't already believed and taken to heart. And am so fully convinced and persuaded of it, I'm doing all I can to convince everybody of it.

[7 : 17] Because this is not a life-giving message. This is the life-giving message. There is none other.

No matter how you stack it, nothing comes out above this. Paul said, I delivered unto you. It is of first importance. And I'm speaking from experience because I have embraced it myself.

And I know what this truth does in a person's life. Wow. First, who was he? Well, he says Christ died for our sins.

Christ. The word in the Greek is Yeshua. Jesus, the Messiah. Yeshua Hamashiach.

The Jews would pronounce it. Jesus, the Messiah. And the Messiah, the word Messiah in Hebrew means sent one, anointed one, especially designated one.

[8 : 24] One who was especially designated, anointed, picked out, chosen by the Father to do what he did. So we have an eternal father delegating a responsibility to an eternal son.

And I do not understand that relationship other than to say that that is the definition that deity provides us because it is as close as we can come to understanding the connection between the Father and the Son.

And that is God the Father and God the Son are not two gods. They comprise one being as well with the Holy Spirit who is also fully God.

And none of them are one third God. And it is not a question of modalism, as some believed in an earlier century, because they could not understand how can God have a son?

Is the Holy Spirit supposed to be his wife? Did they have some kind of eternal male-female relationship and produce Jesus, the Son?

[9 : 41] No. That's not even close. Problem is, we just cannot adequately define deity and the properties that belong to deity.

We cannot come any closer to doing that than what a common, ordinary insect can understand the relationship between a human man and a human woman and a human offspring.

The distance removed is about as great, maybe even greater, because the difference between humanity and deity is infinity.

Think of that. Think of that. So how is God going to couch this relationship in some way that we can at least get a little bit of a handle on it?

He talks about a father and a son. And all we know about that is on a purely human level. But be advised, the existence of deity far transcends humanity.

[10 : 52] Because after all, we're talking about the distinction between creator and creature, which is more than considerable.

So we are told that he, the Messiah, the Anointed One, died for our sins.

We know who he is. And what he did was, he died for our sins. Have you ever talked with anyone and tried to explain to them the issue about Christ dying for their sins, only to hear them retort with, well, I don't have any of those.

Well, perhaps their chiefest sin is self-deception. Because we are all flawed and we are all contaminated with this terrible thing called sin.

And it is that which makes us self-centered automatically. Before Adam and Eve disobeyed God, God was their focus.

[12:07] They concentrated on him. They saw everything vested in him as the creator. And when they disobeyed him, the focus changed.

It switched from their focus being on God to their focus being on themselves. Three most important people in the world.

I, myself, and me. And don't you get in my way. The problem is, three most important people in your life, you, yourself, you know what I mean.

We're all like that. And it is because of that ugliness that causes us to be self-centered that the one who was totally devoid of being self-centered was the one who sacrificed himself.

And what biblical Christianity is all about. And what Easter is all about. What Calvary is all about.

What the resurrection is all about. Is substitution.

[13:13] That's the essence of Christianity. And it goes way, way back. It goes all the way back. It goes all the way back to Genesis 3.

When God came searching for Adam and Eve who were hiding from him because of their guilt. And by the way, this is the same one with whom they enjoyed fellowship in the cool of the day.

Now they're hiding from him because guilt will do that. Guilt produces fear. Fear and the fear of discovery or the fear of punishment. So they're hiding from God. And God said, where are you?

They said, we made these fig leaves. We hid because we were naked. God said, naked?

Who told you naked? That wasn't a problem before. Well, that all goes together. It's part of a substitutionary package because as a result, God took animal skins.

[14:11] Now, how do you suppose he took animal skins without killing the animal? And when he killed the animal, he took a lower life form of an animal, lower than a human being, and used that to cover the nakedness of our first parents.

And I won't go into my theory of nakedness, but it's too involved, but it is fascinating. And we find all of this wrapped around this one word called substitution.

And when Israel became a nation, God established with them and for them a sacrificial system.

Well, what is this about all of these animals being slain, slaughtered? Poor, dumb, innocent animals. What do they do? You understand that they are created on an entirely different level than humanity, and they do not bear the image and likeness of God, which is what makes us really special, because we do.

And animals, this lower life form, because they were inadequate, all God could use them for was a temporal means.

[15:37] As the writer of Hebrews says, it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin.

Well, if it couldn't take away sin, what did it do? It just covered sin. It was just a temporary thing. It was that which would have to do for the time being until a permanent solution was provided.

And 4,000 years later, here comes the permanent solution. The king cried out, John the Baptist, repent.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

That's what all of those animals, innocent animals, thousands of them.

And by the way, they didn't just kill these animals just to be killing them. They killed them to eat them. It was part of their food. It was a feast. And the Jews gathered at least three times a year for these great feasts.

[16:51] And every Jew that was available for miles around came in for the feast, tabernacles, Pentecost, Passover. And they had a big celebration. And all these animals were slain.

And they had an immense barbecue that you just can't imagine. And it went on for days and days. And it was a time of celebration. Does anybody see a connection between all of those animals that were slain that were lesser life forms than those for whom it was slain?

You see any connection between that and a greater life form? That would provide more than adequate substitution so that it would not be a covering temporary so the high priest would have to go in again year later, year after year after year.

No. No. This man, by one sacrifice for all, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. It was the nature and the value of the sacrifice being the God-man.

I don't understand that. I do not understand that. I don't understand how Jesus Christ as a human being, fully human, is fully God as well.

[18 : 23] I don't have to understand that. And it's a good thing because I just don't have the gray matter that would enable me to do that. But the scriptures make it ever so clear that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

Such was the extent and the efficacious nature of the payment that Jesus made. It was more than enough.

It was more than adequate. Only because of who he was. Only because the value of the sacrifice transcended the value of all of those for whom the sacrifice was made.

But how could that be? Because there are billions of people, not millions, but billions of people for whom the sacrifice was made. Yet, this being, this God-in-the-flesh person, had within him the capacity to pay in full the sin debt of every human being who ever lived or ever would live.

Does that give you a little bit of an idea? We're talking about, what have we got in this world now? Six and a half billion people? That's with a B.

[19 : 49] Are we suggesting that the intrinsic nature and value of the God-man Christ Jesus was greater than that of six and a half billion people?

Yes! That's exactly what we're saying. We're talking about the infinity that separates deity from humanity. And it isn't that great. It's even greater.

More than enough. So that when the Father looked upon the Son, he saw the travail of his soul and was satisfied.

When Jesus uttered those words, Tetelestai! It is finished.

It is finished. Wow. And God agreed. That will suffice. That will do. And to demonstrate God's approval of the payment that was made, he brought him back from the dead three days later.

[20 : 56] Now, we just don't get all of that either because we think, well, all right, so Jesus died on the cross for our sins, so he was separated from God.

But, no big deal. Three days later, we got him back again. What's so great about that? That is just proof positive that you do not understand, nor do I, the nature of the separation that was experienced between the Father and the Son in that horrible period of three hours from 12 noon to 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Jesus cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He was screaming out in his humanity because his humanity was the only thing that could suffer death.

Jesus was God as well as man. But God can't die. How do we separate these two? God was in Christ.

The Christ part of him died. What about the God part? You see, what I'm saying, and there is a tendency on the part of us humans to look at something like that and say, Well, that doesn't make any sense.

[22 : 25] So we dismiss the whole thing. And out of our arrogance, we say, If it doesn't make sense to me, it didn't happen.

Or it isn't worth believing. Which is tantamount to saying, I ought to be able to fully understand everything that God is and does.

And if I can't, I'm just not going to buy it. Well, good luck with that. It's not going to happen. There is a great gulf that separates deity from humanity.

And God in his grace has been pleased to give us just an inkling of it by providing God in the flesh to dwell among us.

And we beheld his glory, John says, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Marvelous. And what did he do? He died for our sins. And why did he do it?

[23 : 21] He did it so you wouldn't have to. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. That's rather exemplary, isn't it?

Every now and then we read some heroic story where somebody risked their life or even gave their life so that someone else could live. But it's usually because we have a feeling for that person,

whoever it might be, whether it's a buddy in combat or something of that nature.

But Jesus gave his life for his enemies. Never get over that.

Never expect to. He did it because he loved us, like John 3.16 says. Like Romans 5.8 says, God commendeth.

God demonstrated. God showed. God put on display his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[24 : 29] Amazing. While we were so utterly, completely, totally unlike God, he didn't hold that against us. But he loved us anyway.

That's called Calvary love. And it's just. And this substitution thing is all what it's all about, too. Christ died for our sins.

The authority for that, the scriptures. And that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures. And that simply proved that it was enough because God raised him.

God was satisfied with the payment that Jesus made in his humanity. Being who he was, God was in Christ reconciling the world. So it was enough.

And God raised him. We're told in Romans 4.25 that Jesus was delivered. Think about this now. Says he was delivered for our offenses.

[25 : 35] Who delivered him? Some would say, well, Pontius Pilate delivered him.

Pontius Pilate couldn't be assuaged by any other argument and he told the Jews, all right, take him then and crucify him. Take him, get him out of here. So Pilate delivered.

But that's not what the text is talking about. It was, he was delivered. You've got to look at the context. Do you think for a moment that Pilate delivered Jesus for our offenses?

Of course not. Pilate delivered Jesus to get the pressure of the Jews off of him and to get him out of his realm to dispense with the whole problem, to just get rid of him.

He didn't deliver him for offense. He delivered him because it was politically expedient to do it. God, his father, delivered the son for you.

[26 : 44] Think of that. For you multiplied six and a half billion times over. That's what he did. And that's why he did it.

This substitution thing is all about that. And when these animals were brought to the sacrifice and they were slain for all those feast days, thousands and thousands of animals, bulls, sheep, goats, you name it, all of them, year after year after year, they were all designed to point to the principle of substitution that would one day be fulfilled in the Son of God himself.

What we are talking about is what I call the centerpiece of the universe.

You're not going to find anything to top this. Can't be done. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

God was in Christ.

[28 : 18] To the Jew, it's a stumbling block. To the Greek, Paul says, it's foolishness. You mean to tell me that somebody who wasn't even smart enough to avoid his own crucifixion is somehow supposed to be the savior of the whole world?

You've got to be kidding. That's why they regard it as foolishness. And I ask you something. From a pure, plain, human, common sense, does that compute?

Nope. It does not compute. Does not seem to make any sense at all. It just doesn't. In our mind, it doesn't add up.

And the word that the Greeks used for that is translated into English foolishness. But in the Greek, it's moronic. You know, there are people today, when they hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, that thing of first importance, that God was in Christ.

Christ died for our sins. You hear that? And you'd have to be a moron to believe that. He couldn't even save himself, and yet he's supposed to save the whole world.

[29 : 38] Does not make any sense. And they're right. It doesn't make any sense, humanly speaking. It just doesn't. It doesn't add up. But it makes a lot of sense to God.

And that's all that matters. And if you want a commentary on that, at your leisure, you can read the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, where he talks about the wisdom of the world, as opposed to the wisdom of God.

And Paul says, the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God. And the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world.

God operates and lives on a higher plane. But he is gracious enough and loving enough to bring so much that he can down to a level that we can grasp.

And we do not get all that is involved in this glorious gospel. We don't understand so much of it. that we don't need to get it all.

[30 : 46] We just need to get a little bit. We just need to understand and admit and agree. I am lost. I am undone.

I am no better than anyone else. I'm cut from the same bolt of cloth as is all humanity. And the proof lies in the fact that I'm going to die.

If you don't think you're a sinner, then you needn't even think about death because only people who are sinners die.

And we're all sinners. The question is, are you a redeemed sinner or an unredeemed sinner?

Saved sinner or a lost sinner? We're all sinners. Billy Graham was asked by a correspondent one time, says, you're always preaching about sin, talking about sin.

How exactly, how do you define that? And he gave the best definition I've ever heard. He said, a sinner is anyone who is less perfect than God.

[31 : 50] Bingo! Kind of covers the waterfront, doesn't it? Yeah. Gets us all. The payment that he made was enough and that's why God raised him from the dead.

Can't imagine there is no single distinguishing feature that so separates Christianity from all other faiths and belief systems as this.

This is the, I guess we could call it the sine qua non of Christianity. That without this, without this, you may have trappings of Christianity, but without this, you don't have Christianity.

You've got some kind of a phony. It is this that gives the Christian faith its necessary exclusivity.

And if you traffic in this exclusivity, you're not going to get far until you run into some opposition because it is not appreciated.

We do not live in a world that features exclusivity, really. We are in a culture and a world now that is all about inclusivity.

[33 : 07] Inclusivity. And if you claim exclusiveness, despite the fact that Islam is exclusive, Buddhism is exclusive, all of the other cults, et cetera, they are exclusive.

But when Christianity comes along and says, Jesus said, he is the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but my, you're narrow and bigoted and you Christians, that's the problem with you Christians.

You think your way is the only right way. Well, as I've said before, it wasn't our idea. You see, God has a thing about his son and he vested everything in him.

I love the quote by John Lennox. John Lennox was for a number of years before he retired, was professor of mathematics at Oxford University in Great Britain and he often debated Richard Dawkins, world famous atheist.

and when he was accused of following Christianity and being narrow and bigoted and so on, Dawkins replied, Dr. Lennox replied, why should Christians be thought narrow and bigoted?

[34 : 35] Because they receive something from Jesus Christ that nobody else even offers. Wow. That really brings it down, doesn't it?

Yeah. And has it always been this way? Has exclusivity always been a problem? Oh, yes. Yes. It's always been a problem because the exclusivity of Christianity is rooted and based in truth.

And you surely understand, do you not, that wherever truth is, there's always plenty of error.

Always. truth is always outnumbered by error.

It's always been that way. How greatly outnumbered was Noah and his family? I rest my case.

Now, truth as a minority doesn't mean that the minority is right because it's the minority.

[35 : 45] No, no. Sometimes the minority is wrong. Very often, the minority about different subjects can be dead wrong. We might even call them flakes or whatever.

But the minority isn't right because it's a minority and the majority isn't wrong because it's a majority. If it's wrong, it's wrong. It doesn't make any difference if there's just one person holding that position or if most of the world does, as in the days of Noah.

A thing is right if it corresponds to reality. If it is true, it will correspond to reality. If it isn't, it won't stand the test. And you know, Moses had to deal with this years ago, many, many years ago.

We have all kinds of, I've been told, 1,500 different major, minor religions, cults, conventions, splits, splinters, however you want to classify them, over 1,500 in the western world.

Think of that. That's a lot of error. And who are we? What gives us the right to say we have the truth?

[37 : 09] We're the only ones that have the truth. Well, we have to take that position and the heat that goes with it because if you do not, you are other than Christian.

Do you understand that? And it can be a really uncomfortable position to be in at times. Moses contended with this with early Israel.

Do you ever hear of Dagon? D-A-G-O-N. Dagon! He was the god of the Philistines.

One of the most frequent enemies of the Israelites. His name was Dagon. He was a false deity. He was the one that when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and brought it into their temple, the temple of Dagon.

And they brought the Ark of the Covenant in with the idea of saying, our god Dagon is bigger than the god of Israel. And here is this box, this covenant with these angels arching over it.

[38 : 28] And this is supposed to be the representation of the god of Israel. Yeah, well, we conquered them and we got their old box and we brought it in here and we set it up right in front of our god, Dagon.

Three cheers for Dagon. And everybody was rooting and cheering for Dagon. And there was a little chest about five feet long, two feet wide sitting there in front of Dagon with these overarching cherubim on top.

And they had a big party, big celebration and then everybody went home, went to bed and they came in the next morning and the box was still there and the god Dagon had fallen over and was flat on his face.

Draw your own conclusion. And not only happened then, it happened again. And then there was Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, false god. And Paul makes it quite clear when he writes to the Corinthians all of these idols and the food that is offered to idols and images and all of the superstitious nonsense that was going on in the first century.

Paul says these people don't realize it. They don't understand it. But that to whom they are really offering these things are demons.

[39 : 56] demons. This is demonic activity and these people don't even know it, don't even understand it. And then there was the god Ashtaroth, the god of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the god of the Ammonites, and Baal, the god of other pagans.

And there in the midst of all of these was this tiny little nation of Israel with their one god, creator, god of heaven, on earth, lord god Jehovah.

The only people and the whole shebang that were monotheistic, one god. And yet, do you know what their besetting sin was?

Idolatry. Can you believe that? Idolatry? And for their idolatry, God allowed the Babylonians to invade them and enslave them for 70 years and for their idolatry.

And by the way, who were the Babylonians? They were pagan worshippers of false gods. Amazing.

[41 : 10] Isn't this poetic justice that God allows something like that? And then, the Romans. God allowed the Romans to beset his people, Israel.

Defeat them. Have occupational troops by the thousands there in Israel with all of their religious paraphernalia and their guidons with their multiple gods and deities.

And the Romans had a god for this and a god for that and a god for this and a god for that. And the Greeks had one that would counterpart that. And it was all steeped in idolatry.

How long has this been with us? Well, it goes all the way back to Genesis. And it is epidemic.

Where there is truth, untruth is always there and in the majority. Truth has always been lonely. We need to understand that.

[42 : 12] If you do not have savvy and understanding that we are in a minority, always have been and always will be, you may be terribly uncomfortable.

And again, the minority isn't right because it's a minority. If it's right, it's right. The apostle Paul preached a gospel of exclusivity.

And he made much of it everywhere he went. And how well was it received? We have visions of just huge numbers of people responding to his gospel.

It wasn't that way at all. More often than not, it was just a handful of people that responded. and he had to pay a price for the preaching of this truth.

In 2 Corinthians, he gives us a little idea of what he had to go through. Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes.

[43 : 24] Five times. Now, if you get 39 lashes, with the kind of thing they used, it was a stick with pieces of rawhide nailed to the end of the stick.

And in the end of the piece of rawhide, pieces of bone that were inserted in there. And it was about 16, 18 inches long at the end of that stick. And they would wrap that around the person's torso, bare-skinned, and then pull on it.

And it would just flay the back and the ribcage open. Those sharp, bony projectiles would just cut through the flesh, and the blood would start oozing out from everywhere.

And the back after it healed would just be a mass of scars all over. And the reason he was given these lashes, these 39 lashes, they had four thongs attached to it.

And they would give you just enough, actually there were 13, and there were just three, and the 313 was the 39.

[44 : 49] And because no one, think of this if you will, the Romans were so, the Romans were so kind, they wouldn't allow anyone to be given more than 40 lashes, so they were given 39 and stopped.

Thirteen times, with three on those, each one would be 13, would be 39 lashes, and Paul received that five times. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I've spent in the deep, I've been in frequent journeys and dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from a countryman, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren, I've been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights and hunger and thirst, often without food and cold and exposure, apart from such external things, there is a daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.

I want to ask you a question. This is God's chosen vessel. is that any way to take care of your personnel? Why in the world would a God who is supposed to be all-powerful and all-wise allow a choice servant like Paul the Apostle to undergo that kind of treatment?

I'm surprised Paul didn't say, well, thanks but no thanks, I'm through with this chicken job. And you know something? The amazing thing about you is you never find one word of complaint from Paul. Never a, oh, woe is me. Why, where is God when I need him? Why doesn't he come to my rescue? Why do I have to go through those? What, what, what's going on here?

[46 : 38] God is not stepping in and running interference for Paul for the simple reason that he has already bestowed a full-fledged, legitimate volition upon people that allow them to do those kind of things.

Stupid things, wicked things, evil things, inhumane things, brutal things. Why doesn't God just step in and put an end to all of it?

Well, he, he, he fully plans to do that. And Revelation 19 tells us when and how he's going to do it. But in the meanwhile, he is allowing evil to run its full course.

Because if God is going to intervene consistently on behalf of his people, then it makes the volition that he imparted to humanity a joke. And human volition is no joke.

Human volition means you have a will and you are responsible to God for what you do with your will. And this provides the whole basis for divine evaluation, deeds done in the body, whether good or evil, will be brought to the fore and answered for.

[48 : 12] And in the midst of all of this, Paul states what he goes through, but you know what? There's not one word of complaint. Not one word of complaint.

he says, I'm willing to spend and be spent for the gospel.

Why? Because it's the only thing that matters. And Paul could easily identify with the people who were treating him that way because he was one of them.

he was on their side. He was the chief persecutor of those who believed in Jesus. And now he's switched sides and he's the chief proclaimer.

And he had a heart that was just breaking for his fellow Jewish countrymen because he knew exactly where they were coming from.

[49 : 17] He knew exactly why they believed what they did because he could say, I was there. I was one of them. I knew it and I knew it was wrong and I was convinced that it was wrong and that these worshiping Jesus as the Messiah were out to lunch and I was going to put an end to them.

They were cancer that was growing on Judaism and I was determined to do away with them. And then that glorious day on the Damascus road when the Son of God appeared to him.

And Paul trembling is led by the hand as a blind man dazzled by the brilliance of that light into the town of Damascus.

He had come there to round up and take people who were Jews who had fled to Damascus and he was going to put them in chains and take them all the way back to Jerusalem and make them stand trial, most of whom would probably be executed.

Saul, Saul, why persecute us, I may, and nothing would be the same thereafter. Amazing.

Absolutely amazing.

[50 : 34] God in his grace intervened and took this one man and made him, made Saul of Tarsus, Paul the apostle.

Am I a soldier of the cross or you? Must we be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?

Sure, I must fight if I would win. Increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the cross, endure the pain, supported by thy word.

I have a question for you. It's a question I'm asking myself. Do we value our own comfort so much that it prevents us from proclaiming the gospel?

Is our own comfort more important than the lost people we are commissioned to win? I don't know about you, but I have real difficulty sometimes sharing my faith with people.

[51 : 47] And you know what? I'm supposed to be the pro. I'm supposed to be the guy who's really good at this. You've heard me say before that every one of us, even as a believer, has a yellow streak down our back.

And for some of us it's wider than others. others. But let's face it, most of us would prefer to go silent and clam up rather than to be thought ill of, wouldn't we?

Of course we would. Let's be honest. And as I've said before, when I point my finger at you, guess where these three are pointing?

it would be an easy thing to do if Christianity and justification by faith and all the rest of it were an easy sell, then you could just go along with the flow.

But it isn't an easy sell because you cannot go on the offense with the gospel of Jesus Christ without offending people.

[53 : 04] Think of that. Who wants to do that? I want to make friends. I don't want to make enemies. But as you've heard me say, and others have said before, a lot of times people get mad before they get saved.

Conviction has to work on them for a while. But we all have just enough cowardliness in us that makes us pull back. And it's especially easy to do it today because we live in a culture that is no longer friendly and inviting to Christianity.

And as long as it is, it's easy to talk about Jesus. But when the heat's on, shut up. Clam up.

don't even let people know you believe. That's pretty much what's going on today. And by the way, have you heard much about personal evangelism over the last 10 years?

Have you heard much about people leading others to Christ? Oh, it happens. Thank God it still does happen. God but it is more and more of a rarity. I can remember back before the earth's crust hardened when I was a new believer, it was pretty common.

[54 : 31] People were getting saved all the time. And not just at Billy Graham crusades but in churches and everywhere. But today, not so much.

Why is that? because the culture is unaccepting. We're today into this inclusive thing.

And if you embrace something as being singular and the only way, you are branded as I'll tell you what they'll call you.

They'll call you a hater. You're a hater. Isn't that something? Isn't it amazing? This is a change in the shift of culture and Christians need to understand this is what's going on.

And it's going to take some extra oomph and extra moxie and extra courage to speak of the only one who can save the soul in a day like this.

[55 : 33] Who else has a gospel of forgiveness? Who else has a gospel of eternal life? Who else has a gospel of deliverance from sin? Who else has a gospel of pure grace for embracing?

Who else has the privilege and the responsibility for doing it? I tell you, we are so blessed with the message we have that I sometimes think I want to close with this question.

I want to ask you this. Is there something wrong with the message? No. There's something wrong with the audience.

You get that? There's something wrong with the audience. that's why we have the message to give to the audience.

What a privilege. What an awesome responsibility. But I'll tell you this. God will require nothing from you that he has not given you the ability to provide.

[56 : 56] And for that I'm so grateful. I want you in closing to look at this purple sheet. This lavender sheet that you've got here. And if you would stand please.

I just want to point out something to you. Let's take this. It's in your bulletin. It's just this little purple insert. From Hebrews chapter 10.

With this, this will be our benediction. I'm going to read it. I want you to follow along. And I'm just going to read the bold print that happens to be the King James version. The other translations follow along.

And what Paul, the writer of Hebrews is doing is making a comparison here between the law of Moses and what we have today. And beginning in verse 28 he says, he that despised Moses' law, and to despise means to look down your nose at, means to discount, to vilify, to reject.

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. of how much sore punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God and has counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing and has done despot unto the Spirit of grace.

[58 : 22] Think of that. When Jesus was betrayed the night before, he took the cup and he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. And that instituted what we call the communion service.

And that's the blood of the covenant of which he's speaking there. And to call that an unholy thing, to call the blood that Christ shed on the cross unholy, common, not worth any more than anybody else's blood, and has done despot unto the Spirit of grace.

That means despised the Spirit of grace. And grace is that which God extends to you even though you do not deserve it at all.

You have no claim upon it, but God offers it and gives it to you as a free gift. And those who still reject it have done despot or despised the Spirit of grace.

For we know him that hath said, vengeance belongs unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord.

And I just want to close with this thought. It is the most glorious, wonderful thing in the world to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and know that you are a forgiven sinner and that heaven is your home because Jesus Christ did for you what you couldn't do for yourself.

[59 : 51] He paid the penalty for your sins. That's the greatest thing in the world. And do you know what the worst thing in the world is? To walk away from that.

To say, not for me. I don't need that. I'm better than that. Worst thing in the world. Let us pray. Father, out of all we've said, there's still a lot that we just don't understand. But we understand enough to be able to respond to it, to make a decision.

And our prayer for each and every person here is that they may know the sheer joy, the forgiveness, the release of knowing that all is well between them and the Savior.

Because Jesus Christ died for our sin, and we've appropriated him as our personal Lord and Savior, we are not held responsible for sin because Jesus picked up the tab.

[61 : 02] He paid it all, offers it to us as a free gift. We don't understand that kind of love, but we believe it and we rejoice in it. And our prayer as we close is for any of these dear folks who may be here, and perhaps everyone here is in Christ and has made that decision, but it's also likely that there are those who have not.

So our hearts go out to them because we know where they are because we were there too. And the light of the gospel came into us and we received Jesus Christ and his forgiveness and his pardon and his love and his grace and he's turned everything around and we are so grateful.

We love this so much we want to share it with everyone. That's why we're here and that's why we're saying what we say. We pray now that as you dismiss us we will go from here to wherever our appointed rounds are, mindful of the words of scripture, that ultimate thing, that most important thing, Christ died for our sins.

Don't allow us to get it out of our system without responding positively to it. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.