

# Special Messages from 2018

## Why the Cross?

Unedited Transcript

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Well, good morning, guys. It's great to see you this morning. Happy Good Friday. For those of you watching online, we're here on Good Friday. I know you're not going to see this for a couple of weeks or a couple of years, depending on when you download it, but we're glad to have you with us this morning. I am stoked. For those older guys, that means excited in young people parlance.

You're welcome. I'm stoked to talk to you this morning about the cross. When Pat and I talked about our schedule for teaching and it came that I was going to teach on Good Friday and we decided that we would ... he would let me do a special message. I would get to do a special message, and so I'm really excited to talk to you about the cross this morning, because really, everything comes down to the cross, everything.

Before we do that, let's give a shout-out to our guys in Texas, in San Antonio, Texas, the Texas Disciples led by Ray Garcia in San Antonio. These guys meet on Tuesdays at 6:00 p.m. at one of the guys' houses, and they watch the video Bible study together. Guys, good to see you, and let's give those guys a round of applause. Welcome. One, two, three. Hoo-ah.

All right. Well, we are talking about the cross today, and this is the outline for us all. We're going to talk about the story of the cross, the power of the cross, and the calling of the cross. The story of the cross, the power of the cross, and the calling of the cross, and when you look at the cross, the cross is the culmination of about five or six days in Jesus' life that lead up to him being crucified on the cross.

When I started looking at this again, I was actually amazed. If you look at the events leading up, the five or six days leading up to the cross, leading up to Good Friday, there are 29 chapters in the gospels dedicated just to the time for about a week before the resurrection, up through the resurrection, 29 chapters. We're going to go through all of them right now. All right.

### **THE STORY OF THE CROSS**

Let's talk about the story of the cross. What I thought I would do is I would just go day by day with what happened leading up to Jesus dying on the cross. We're going to go back a week, a week before the crucifixion, and on Friday, Jesus ... The Friday before, Jesus arrives in Bethany, and he goes and he hangs out with his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. For the rest of the week, what happens is, is that Jesus stays with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany. Then he gets up in the morning and he walks a couple of miles into Jerusalem and then at the end of the day, he goes back to their house again. and that's where he sleeps.

Now do you know what he was there for? Do you remember what he was there for? Why was he in Jerusalem? Passover week. Right? Well, why was he ... We're going to see why he was in Jerusalem. But

he was in Jerusalem officially for Passover week. The amazing thing about this week is that it's not ... Jesus did not come for Passover and accidentally get killed at the end of the week.

This is a very intentional set of circumstances that happened, a very intentional set of activities, a very intentional set of provocations that Jesus did to really kind of rile up the religious leaders. He had sort of pushed in on them and then pulled back, pushed in on them and pulled back throughout his ministry. When things got a little hot, he would head back up to Galilee and he would teach up in Galilee where most of the disciples were from and where he had grown up partly.

Then, he would come back to Jerusalem and make a little trouble, and then when it got a little hot, he'd go back up to Galilee again. Some of those trips are when interesting things happened, like his trip ... because Samaria was between Galilee and Jerusalem. For instance, the woman at the well was on one of those trips back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem.

But on this trip, Jesus came with a very specific intention. He knew that by the end of the week ... When he got to Bethany, he knew that in seven days he'd be executed. He knew that in seven days he would be killed. So he gets there on Friday. On Saturday, there's the story of Mary anointing Jesus' feet, and Judas complains about it because he thinks it's a waste of money. Interesting. Judas Iscariot.

Then on Palm Sunday is the triumphal entry. How many of you had triumphal entry services on Palm Sunday and the kids walked, waving their palm branches down the aisle? Palm Sunday is the triumphal entry. Monday, he was walking in and he's hungry and he sees a fig tree, and he goes up to the fig tree and there's no figs on the tree, and so he curses the tree. Then, just to continue in his bad mood, he walks into the temple and clears it out.

This is the second time that he's done this now, and, frankly, this action, this clearing of the temple, was really one way that Jesus was just throwing down the gauntlet, because the temple marketplace was one of the ways that the priests supported themselves. The temple marketplace, they charged rent. The businesses, the money changers would have very horrible exchange rates for people, because you could not use money from the countryside. You had to use temple currency, which was basically only useful in the temple.

It's kind of crazy. They would take your money in the courtyard. Imagine if you went to church and they said, "Oh, well, we only take, you know, First Baptist dollars here, and you get one First Baptist dollar for every two dollars of U.S. currency, but we expect you to tithe on your 1040." That's kind of what it would be like. There's probably pastors watching this right now that are going, "Wait a second." No. No. Okay.

Jesus clears the temple out, and this is a very provocative thing that he does, a very provocative thing that he does. Then, the next day, Tuesday, is temple day, so we have a little follow-up to the fig tree story. The day before, the fig tree had no figs on it. The next day, it's dried up. There's a whole sermon there. We're not going to do that now. But then, on Tuesday, he's teaching in the temple. Remember, he has cleared out the courtyard the day before.

Now, all the religious leaders, they've heard that Jesus is back in the temple, and so they're like, "We're going to go get him." They go into the temple, and they start challenging Jesus and challenge after

challenge after challenge. They challenge his authority. They challenge his knowledge of the scriptures, of the law of the prophets. They even challenge his political savvy, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar?"

Jesus just astounds them all. He does not give any quarter, to the point that a couple of times, they say, well, they were afraid to answer. They would ask him a question. He would answer them with a question, and they would say they were afraid to answer his questions because he was making, basically he was making them look stupid.

This passion week is not a course on how to win friends and influence people. It's a course on how to get yourself killed. Jesus is in there challenging the authority. He denounces the religious leaders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the elders, the Sanhedrin, which is the ruling religious body. This is when he sees the widow give the widow's mites that we talk about all the time. This is when he tells people that he's going to be crucified. He tells the disciples he's going to be crucified, and they still don't seem to understand. I don't know if they think it's just another allegory or metaphor or parable, but he tells them that he's going to be killed.

One of the most amazing things to me about this time is that this is in the temple during Passover week, so you got to realize there's people from all over. Jews from all over would make the journey to Jerusalem for Passover week. Jesus is teaching in a way that the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes and the elders, the most educated, learned people would understand what he was teaching, and he's teaching in a way that the country bumpkins could hear the same message and get just as much out of it as these scribes and Pharisees. It's just an amazing testimony to Jesus' powers as a teacher, as a communicator, and the way that he was able to do that.

Wednesday is basically kind of a rest day. You can imagine why Wednesday would be a rest day because Thursday is the arrest day. Things really speed up. We know that Judas goes and plots with the Sanhedrin on Wednesday. He's cleared the temple out Monday. He made them look stupid on Tuesday. By Wednesday, they've had it with him. They find a chink in the armor. They get Judas Iscariot. He goes and he plots. Jesus goes to Simon the leper's house and a woman anoints him. So sort of a quiet day on Wednesday.

Then Thursday is when everything really accelerates. Thursday, they have the Passover, the Last Supper. There's an incredible amount of teaching, for instance, in John on this time together in the upper room. That's what the upper room is, is the place that Jesus has the Last Supper with the disciples. He initiates the communion process, the bread and the wine that we all celebrate in church on a regular basis. He washes their feet. He tells them to love each other. He tells them to serve each other. He tells them to become servants, to become the least instead of the first.

Then, at the end of supper ... Now we're into Thursday night, so we're into Friday from the way that the Jews look at a day of the week. It started at sundown. Now we're into Friday of the Jewish day. He goes into the Garden of Gethsemane, and there is where he's betrayed. I want you to think about this. Friday comes, right? He gets arrested overnight. He has all these trials. He goes to Caiaphas' house, and they're basically stalling at Caiaphas' house so that the Sanhedrin can convene. Caiaphas would be the next ... is the high priest. The past high priest is the one that runs the marketplace, so Caiaphas is the next guy to run the marketplace.

Caiaphas obviously has an investment in whether that marketplace continues and Jesus has really kind of created a little bit of a revolt, most likely by pointing ... Trust me, everybody knew that the temple currency was a rip-off. Everybody knew that the pigeons and doves and sheep and whatever they would buy in the temple courtyard was like trying to get gas next to an airport. They knew it, but Jesus went in there, and he's a rabbi and he's the teacher and he points it out in a powerful and provocative way, and the temple leaders are ticked, with a capital T.

They go to Caiaphas' house. They abuse him there. Then he gets in front of the Sanhedrin. Then he goes to see Pilate. They say the word Galilee in front of Pilate, and Pilate goes, "Oh, good. I'm not in charge of Galilee. Herod's in charge of Galilee. I'll send him to Herod." Herod goes, "No. Nice try, buddy. I'm not doing this one." They're all scared of Caesar. That's why they're scared of what's going to happen. So Herod sends him back to Pilate. The Jews are basically saying, "You either kill him or we're going to tell Caesar that you're basically encouraging sedition," not anything that a Roman-appointed governor would want to have anything to do with. It would be the end of his career and maybe the end of his life and maybe the end of his family's lives.

Pilate agrees basically to have him executed. He's already been beaten and scourged. They take him up to Golgotha. He's crucified between two thieves, and by sundown, by sundown on Friday night he is dead and buried. Now I want you to think about this. At the Last Supper, as Jesus is teaching the disciples, it's already after dark. They're gathered for dinner at dusk, and as he's teaching them, he knows that in less than 24 hours, he will be dead. He will be in the grave.

Imagine the power of that teaching. Imagine the clarity that it must have brought to that time. Even though the disciples really didn't understand where they were at, Jesus understood where he was at. Jesus knew what was going to happen. It's said that when he was praying in the garden, he pleaded, "God, if there's any way you can take this away from me, if there's any way that we could do this a different way, please take this cup from me. But not my will, but yours be done." In his humanity, he's frightened. He's sweating. The dread, it causes his sweat to become like blood pouring off him. He's so racked with sort of these human emotions that he's experiencing, knowing what's to come. And he's crucified and he's dead.

Saturday, the Sabbath, everybody rests, and then Sunday morning the women go to the tomb to make sure that everything's in order because he's buried quickly to get him buried in time for sundown on Friday. They go, and the tomb is empty and the stone is rolled away. They go and grab the disciples. Peter and John go running to the tomb, and the tomb is empty and Jesus starts appearing. Then over the next few weeks, he appears over and over and over again to groups of disciples and groups of his followers until finally, a large group of them watches him being taken up into heaven.

## **THE POWER OF THE CROSS**

That's the story of the passion week. That's the story that leads us to the cross and what happens after the cross. If that's the story, then what is the power of the cross? When Jesus is on the cross, there's two ... He says a few things, "I'm thirsty. Can you give me a drink?" Talks to the thief and says, "Today you'll see me in paradise." But the two things that I want to really talk about are the last two things he says. In John 19:30, he says, as he's about to die, he says, "tetelestai" in Greek, which means it is finished.

In his last breaths, he's trying to tell us what's happened. What's happening in this process of him being crucified is that it's finished. Well, what's finished? Well, the word "tetelestai" was the word that was used in merchant interactions. You would basically go and you would buy something, and you would get what you had bought. You would give them the money for it, and then the merchant would say, "tetelestai". It is finished. This transaction is completed. By Jesus using that word "tetelestai", what he's saying is, "There is a transaction that has just happened, and my death is settling the debt. What you have gotten in return, you're going to get what I ... I bought something. I paid for something."

What has Jesus paid for? Well, what he's paid for is something that he had no obligation to pay for at all, something that he had no ... He has cleaned out an account. He has settled an account that he did not put any debt into on his own at all. The account that he cleaned out, the account that he settled, that he paid for, was your account and my account. All of the sins.

If you want some fascinating reading, read Leviticus sometime. Now you're going to say, "That sounds crazy," and, frankly, if you just read Leviticus sort of out of context, it's boring. It's all these sacrifices. But if you read Leviticus understanding that all of these sacrifices, all of these processes, what they're doing is they're pointing to the fact that in ourselves, it takes all of this action for us to even come close to comprehending our guilt in front of a holy God, and Jesus is going to settle it on a cross.

He is going to finish the transaction. The beginning of the transaction is all these guilt offerings and sin offerings and this offering and that offering and the first of this and the first 10 of that, and do this in this place and do this in that place. All that God the Father is trying to show the Israelites in all those sacrifices is, "You can't do this. You can try as hard as you want. I'll give you tons of processes to go through that are going to maybe make you feel a little bit better, but at the end of the day, you cannot do it." There's only one person that can do it. God can do it, and the only way he can do it is by sacrificing his Son. Jesus spends this week making sure, making dead solid sure that the Jews are going to grab him and the Romans are going to kill him so that he can pay the debt on our behalf. That is the power of the cross.

Now this process of paying off the debt, there's a theological term for it, and the theological term is called the atonement. When you atone for something, you make something right, you pay something off, you've atoned. Jesus is the atonement for us and Jesus' willingness to suffer and die, apart from God's love. This is the next thing that happens. Jesus says, "It is finished," and another point right before this, he says my ... What does he say? "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Now he's quoting Psalm 22 when he says this. Because when he quotes Psalm 22, what that does to the Jews, they know. They know that. They hear him say that, and then they go back to Psalm 22 and they realize all that's surrounding it, they realize it's a prophetic psalm, and so he's fulfilling prophecy, but he's also expressing this truth that Jesus suffered and died apart from God's presence. He willingly underwent separation from God and suffering apart from God. Why? So we don't have to. That's the whole purpose of it, was to satisfy God's wrath, to choose self-sacrifice so that we could have justice, that he could give us justice where he paid the penalty, and the cross is the key to this.

James Montgomery Boice is a theologian. He says it this way, "There is no gospel without the cross." There is no gospel without the cross. Christmas by itself is no gospel. The life of Christ is no gospel. Even the resurrection, important as it is in the total scheme of things, is no gospel by itself. For the good news is not just that God became man nor that God has spoken to reveal a proper way of life for us or even that death, the great enemy, is conquered.

Rather, the good news is that sin has been dealt with, of which the resurrection is a proof, that Jesus has suffered its penalty for us as our representative so that we might never have to suffer it. Then, therefore, all who believe in him can look forward to heaven. Emulation of Christ's life and teaching is possible only to those who enter into a new relationship with God through faith in Jesus as their substitute. The resurrection is not nearly a victory over death, though it is that, but a proof that the atonement was a satisfactory atonement in the sight of the Father and that death, the result of sin, is abolished on that basis.

If you don't have the cross, you don't have the gospel. If you don't have the cross, what you have is what a lot of people think of Christianity. They think of, well, it's a bunch of good teachings, nice parables, some good sort of ways of approaching life, love everyone, serve everyone, be kind, be gentle, or you could swing the other way, it's a bunch of rules and regulations that you're supposed to do, but it's not the gospel. That's just right living. That's just performance. That's not the atonement. That's not grace. That's legalism or piety, but it's not the gospel.

This is the power of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 15:17, Paul says, "If Christ is not raised, you are still dead in your sins." What the power of the resurrection here, like Boice says, is that the resurrection proves that the atonement was sufficient. The Father is saying the debt is paid. He's confirming it. The debt is paid, and the resurrection proves that.

That leads us to our **Big Idea**. I couldn't settle on one, so I'm doing two. Okay? Part one is this, is that because of the cross ... Not because of the resurrection alone, not because of Jesus' life and teaching alone, but because of the cross, we are liberated, and we're liberated legally from our guilt in front of a holy and just God. We're liberated relationally from shame and separation from God because Jesus suffered that separation from God on our behalf. We're liberated from death, which is the power of sin. Without the cross, we're not liberated from guilt, shame, or death. Only with the cross, only **because of the cross, are we liberated from guilt, shame, and death.**

## **THE CALLING OF THE CROSS**

If this is the power of the cross, then what is the calling of the cross? If you look at 1 Corinthians 2:2 ... If you have a Bible, turn to 1 Corinthians 2:2. Paul is talking to the Corinthians. If you know anything about this book, this is not a love letter from Paul to the Corinthian church. It has 1 Corinthians 13, but all the rest of the chapters are pretty ... Paul is reminding the Corinthian church of a lot of fundamental, of a lot of basics that they seem to have forgotten, even though he spent a couple of years with them.

He says this in 1 Corinthians 2:2. He says, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. If I could ... I'm educated by Gamaliel. I am a Pharisee of Pharisees. I'm a Jew of the Jews, but when I came to you, I put all that aside so that I could just focus on one thing and one thing alone, Jesus Christ and him crucified." Do you notice it doesn't say, "I would focus on one thing, Jesus Christ and him resurrected," because if you jump to the resurrection and you skip the cross, you've missed the main point. Without the cross, the resurrection isn't the gospel. You need the cross. You need the atonement, and so this is Paul saying this is the fundamental thing.

What's the calling of the cross for us, is to live that out, is to recognize that we are people whose debts have been paid for by somebody else. When we interact with our friends who don't know Jesus, there should be no arrogance about our salvation. We didn't do anything to get it. We should be the most

humble people in the world, because we didn't do anything to get this incredible gift. We didn't do anything to conquer death. We didn't do anything to not be separated from God. We didn't do anything to eliminate our guilt. Jesus did that.

Our calling to remember that Christ in him crucified is part of our calling to service and to humility, because we didn't do anything to deserve it. Brothers, that is what makes us winsome in our culture, in our own communities, and among people that don't know Christ. Not holier than thou, self-righteous culture wars. I'm not saying we don't stand up for morality and for truth, but we need to do it as humble servants of a God who paid a debt for us that we had no right to expect him to pay for us.

In the upper room, we see what Jesus was saying less than 24 hours before he would be arrested, beaten almost to death, and then finished off on the cross. We see him saying stuff like, "Love each other." We see him washing the disciples' feet. We see him focusing those last minutes, those last few hours with the disciples. He's focused on getting their hearts right in the way that they interact with each other and in the way that they interact with the world.

He's not giving lofty theological treatises in the last 12 or 24 hours of his life. He's telling them to love each other and to serve each other. If that's Jesus' admonitions to the disciples right before he dies, shouldn't we take that to heart? Shouldn't we be looking for ways to be in humble service to each other and to those around us? That's the calling of the cross.

In this same passage that I read from James Montgomery Boice, which is out of the Foundations of the Christian Faith, he says this. He says, "Finally, just as there can be no gospel without the atonement as the reason for the incarnation, so also there can be no Christian life without it. Without the atonement, the incarnation theme easily becomes a kind of deification of the human and leads to arrogance and self-advancement. With the atonement, the true message of the life of Christ and, therefore, also the life of the Christian man or woman, is humility and self-sacrifice for the obvious needs of others. The Christian life is not indifference to those who are hungry or sick or suffering from some other lack.

"It is not contentment with our own abundance. Neither the abundance of middle class living with home and cars and clothes and vacations nor the abundance of education or even a spiritual abundance of good churches, Bibles, Bible teaching, or Christian friends and acquaintances. Rather, it is the awareness that others lack these things and that we must therefore sacrifice many of our own interests in order to identify with them and thus bring them increasingly into the abundance that we enjoy. We will live for Christ fully only when we are willing to be impoverished if necessary in order that others might be helped."

This is the calling of the cross. I said because of the cross, we are liberated from shame and guilt and death. That's part one, but here's part two. **Because of the cross, we are called to lives of humility and self-sacrifice.** My challenge to you is to remember the cross. The resurrection is powerful, but the resurrection validates, verifies that what Jesus did on the cross was sufficient, and then because of that sufficiency, we are liberated from shame, guilt, and death.

Let's pray. Father, as we come into this weekend of celebrating Easter, of celebrating your resurrection, Lord, help us to not forget that you were resurrected from a death that was unjust for Jesus but served the cause of justice for the rest of humanity, for those who would follow him, for those you called, and so, Lord, I pray that for all of us that you would help us to remember the great sacrifice that Jesus has

made that we didn't deserve, Lord, so that we could turn around and serve others with humility and sacrifice, especially those that we don't think deserve it, that we would remember that we like Paul, each one of us is chief among sinners. And, Lord, the great amazing love that you have for us, that you would die on the cross, and the power, Father, of the resurrection to show that that atonement was sufficient. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.