

A Sin-bearer so Powerful

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[0 : 01] Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heaven, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

[1 : 40] And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock, and above all beasts of the field.

On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

[2 : 52] He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing.

In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it, all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he does not hear.

[4 : 16] For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity. Your lips have spoken lies. Your tongue mutters wickedness.

No one enters suit justly. No one goes to law honestly. They rely on empty pleas. They speak lies. They conceive mischief, and give birth to iniquity. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands.

Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity. Desolation and destruction are in their highways.

The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths. They have made their roads crooked. No one who treads in them knows peace.

[5 : 19] Therefore, justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us. We hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.

The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man. There was no one to intercede.

Then his own arm brought him salvation. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, the father of David, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit.

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

[6 : 27] Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his lions. In that day, the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

In that day, the Lord, with his heart and great and strong sword, will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, Leviathan, the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad. The desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus. It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.

Be strong, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

[7 : 41] And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah promised that God himself would intervene one day to restore all things, that his own arm would bring salvation. But Peter, the apostle of Christ, tells us how that was actually fulfilled.

He tells us that this was accomplished only as God the great Savior became incarnate in the person of his own son and became himself the great sin bearer for human beings.

Listen to Peter's words. He himself bore our sins on his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By his wounds you have been healed for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

[8 : 56] There is light and joy in Jesus' birth, but also clouds of great darkness for Jesus, who was born to die as our sin bearer so powerful.

Or this babe, still infant crying, shadows of the cross were lying. Well, this Christmas Eve, I'd like to speak for a moment and focus on just these couple of verses where Peter speaks about Jesus' death on the tree, as he calls the cross.

And he tells us that the coming of Jesus into the world means that we have a sin bearer so perfect that he can bring us restoration forever.

The restoration of true humanity and true human life as it was meant to be and as God created human life to be before we spoiled it so bitterly for ourselves by our rebellion against God.

That's what the Bible calls sin. Rebellion against God. So three things then that the apostle of Christ, Peter, clearly tells us in these two verses about why Jesus came into the world at that first Christmas.

[10 : 19] I wonder if you'll look with me at this Christmas Eve, just so that whatever your own beliefs are, whatever your thoughts are, you'll be able to know for sure what the Bible itself tells us about Jesus.

Then you'll know what you're either accepting or rejecting. You'll examine the primary evidence.

And that's what we want to make our judgments on, isn't it? First thing then that Peter says, Jesus came into the world to bring us healing.

The true healing of ultimate reconciliation for humanity. He came to bring us healing from the darkness of sin's night and from the curse of what he calls unrighteousness.

By his wounds, you have been healed. Now, he's clearly not speaking here about medical matters, physical healing in that sense. Peter's alluding to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, whom we've heard, who famously spoke of God's anointed servant who would come and suffer for his people's healing.

You may know the words quite well from Handel's Messiah. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions.

[11 : 34] That is our rebellion against God. He was crushed for our iniquities, our unfaithfulness, and utter unrighteousness in our relationship with God.

And by his stripes, says Isaiah, you were healed. By his wounds, says Peter, you have been healed.

And wouldn't you say that our world of humanity is in need of healing, indeed in desperate need of deep healing? I think unless we either have our heads either in the clouds or in the sand, it's hard to think otherwise.

If you read a newspaper, if you watch the television. You see, the Bible is a real book about the real world. And it tells it as it is. It pulls no punches. Think of those words that we read a little earlier from the prophet Isaiah.

They certainly tell us of a world that needs healing. A world of violence and evil and exploitation of the innocent. Their feet turn to evil.

[12 : 36] They're swift to shed innocent blood. The way of peace, they do not know, says Isaiah. Well, we can sing, can't we? Peace on earth at Christmas. But let me tell you, there's precious little peace in Syria or Iraq or the Central African Republic or many other places today.

Righteousness stands afar off. Truth has stumbled in the public squares. Well, you might think that he is speaking about ancient times, but do we not live in a world of utter disillusionment with public life?

Even in the oldest and most liberal democracies of our Western world. No one goes to law, honestly. They rely on empty pleas.

They speak lies. They conceive mischief. They give birth to iniquity. Sounds like he could be speaking about Plebgate or phone hacking or WikiLeaks or all the rest of it.

But he's not. He's speaking about something 3,000 years ago. Because, you see, the truth is that human beings haven't changed. Not in our hearts.

[13 : 43] Not since ancient days. The issues that face 21st century man are exactly the same as those Isaiah faced 8 centuries BC and all the centuries in between for that matter.

Because we share a common humanity. We share a common human nature. And that nature is damaged. It's corrupted. It's diseased.

It needs healing. And the Bible tells us why. Listen to Isaiah again. Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. And your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear you.

According to the Bible, that is the root problem of humanity. all humanity throughout history, throughout every culture, throughout every nation in our world today. And that fundamental rupture between man and God, our creator, is at the heart of what the Bible calls that word sin.

And when the most precious, the most basic, the most fundamental relationship in human life ruptures, then there's bound to be, isn't there, an inevitable trail of tragedy.

[15 : 03] We know that in our own experience all too sadly. When there's rupture of a fundamental relationship like marriage, brings agonizing pain, doesn't it, upon a whole family, upon a whole community.

When it's multiple, it brings rupture to society, it brings terrible pain to many. But that is the story of man according to the Bible. Genesis 3, we read, it tells of that rupture between God and man with human beings rejecting God's gracious rule, all his blessings, putting themselves at odds with God under their own rule.

And immediately, Genesis chapter 4 begins to tell us the story of the vicious aftermath. Man at odds, not only with God, but with his fellow man. Brother, murdering brother, and on and on it goes. The message is clear. When human beings usurp the place of God, when they banish God from their lives, then the beautiful reign of a sovereign God becomes swapped for the beastly reign of selfish man.

And the relational holocaust that results from that is what explains our world. Relationship rupture and breakdown is at the very heart of our world's problems.

[16:24] Nation at odds with nation in trade wars and currency wars. Evidently, these things end up leading to military wars. Race at odds with race leading to exploitation and resentment and bitterness that poisons a culture for generations.

Look at South Africa today, still decades after the end of apartheid. Still so much poison in that land. Employers at odds with employees leading to misery and stress at work and strife and strikes and all kinds of things.

Man at odds with woman and alas the catastrophic epidemics of relationship breakdown and family rupture damage to children and disintegration in our communities.

Even if some of us, perhaps many of us live in a way a somewhat charmed life insulated from many of these things in our own lives, none of us can avoid the greatest and the most painful rupture of all in life.

The rupture of death itself. It's death, isn't it, that rubs us ultimately of the closest and the dearest and the most precious relationships any of us will ever have in this life.

[17:55] And I guess at this time of year we're more conscious than ever of the darkness and the shadow of death. Some of us no doubt will remember Christmas's past and will know the pain of some who are now absent.

And something deep down within us groans, doesn't it, when we experience that. We understand the scandal of it. We know it just should not be like this.

Yes, our world is so wrong. It is sick. It needs healing. You see, all of these things are merely symptoms caused by the ultimate rupture at the very heart of our universe, caused by human beings in rebellion against God, the Creator.

And no power on earth can possibly ever cure that. We've got the United Nations and the G8 and the IMF and the EU and a hundred other human institutions and powers.

But have they ever cured our world? We've had communism, we've had fascism, we've had capitalism, we've had socialism. Have these cured our world?

[19:14] Some of them have nearly destroyed our world. Will nationalism save us? even the prophets, even the holy men, even the great kings of Israel of the past, none of them could heal the hearts of human beings.

None of them could undo the entail of man's sin. And God saw, said Isaiah in our reading, that there was no man, no one, to mediate and intercede for humanity's sickness, no one to bring healing.

And then, he says, his own arm brought salvation. He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head.

God himself, in the person of his incarnate son, Jesus Christ, came to do what no man could ever do, to bring healing, to bring salvation, and to do so at infinite cost to himself.

He himself, says Peter, bore our sins in his body on the tree. By his wounds, you have been healed. It required a sin bearer so powerful that he could bear away such sin and bring the true healing of ultimate reconciliation between utterly unfaithful human beings and the utterly faithful God.

[20:46] We know that, don't we? We know that it must be. It can only be the one who is sinned against in a relationship when that relationship breaks due to unrighteousness, due to unfaithfulness.

It's only the one sinned against who can offer true reconciliation. It's got to be that one who can invite the unfaithful one back and they're the one who will bear that vast and bitter burden of the cost of forgiveness.

forgiveness. There's no such thing as cheap forgiveness. That's why real forgiveness is such a rare, rare thing in our world.

It's a costly, costly thing to forgive deep, deep wounds. But God himself in Jesus Christ his son shed his own infinitely precious blood to bring true healing ultimate reconciliation with a God who created us.

So great was his faithfulness, so great is his love. He came to bring us healing. And so that means according to Peter, secondly, that Jesus came into this world to bring us health, the true health of ultimate righteousness.

[22:04] Jesus came to make all things right again. His coming heralds the dawning of a new day of life as it was meant to be, where righteousness, where rightness reigns, that is right relationship

with God and therefore with all men.

He came, says Peter, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, not just to deal with the symptoms of the world's disease, but to bring total restoration of God's righteousness, to undo the curse of our separation from God, the curse that turned God's face away from us, left us floundering in our own mess, and he came to make all things right again, and right forever.

That's what God's righteousness is, it's his rightness, everything put right at the root cause of wrong, so that the fruit of that righteousness is at the heart of this universe and begins to show itself everywhere again.

Somebody who has terminal heart failure, they're weak, they're pale, they're blue, they get bloated, they're breathless, they're sick, but if they receive a heart transplant and from the center of their body the strength begins to come back, the color comes back, breath comes back, life comes back to their body.

It's nothing less than the rebirth of this universe that the prophets longed for. We heard being read earlier, in that day said Isaiah the wilderness shall be glad, the desert shall sing and bloom abundantly, it will rejoice with joy and singing, the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, the eyes of the blind will be opened, and sorrow and sighing will flee away forever because God will come and save you.

[24 : 12] Now that is real health, ultimate rightness, righting all that is wrong in this dark world, and that is what the prophets promised was to come.

That's what the end of the Bible's whole story speaks of in John's vision of the glory of a new heavens and a new earth. There he says God will be with his people forever and he'll wipe away every tear from every eye and death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning or crying or pain anymore, for the former things are passed away.

And in the coming of Jesus Christ as a sin bearer so powerful, the light of that new day of health, that new day of ultimate rightness has now dawned in this world.

It's not yet fully here. Peter's clear and plain about that. The whole Bible is. There's no wishful thinking, there's no utopianism in the Bible. That is not yet our possession bodily.

But because of Jesus Christ's accomplished work on the tree, says Peter, sin has been dealt with. And we have a living hope that is certain.

[25 : 28] ultimate rightness, ready to be revealed in the right time at the end when Jesus comes to reign. It's not yet the full brightness of that glorious day, but the sure light of dawn has come with the coming of Jesus.

The very last prophet of the Old Testament, Malachi, spoke words that have now been fulfilled. The son of righteousness has risen with healing in his wings. That's what Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, sang about in his great song.

The coming of Jesus, he said, has given knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God by which the sunrise has visited us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

He came to bring us health, the true health of ultimate rightness for humanity. That's the true grace of Christmas, says Peter.

He came to disperse the gloomy clouds of night, as the carol says, and death's dark shadows to put to flight. So, finally, this verse tells us that Jesus Christ came into this world, therefore, to bring us home, to the true home of ultimate restoration, home to the lordship and leadership, to the care and to the protection of the great shepherd himself, God's eternal son.

[27 : 08] Once, says Peter, you were straying like lost sheep. You were helpless and hopeless in a world totally out of control, but now, because of the one who has healed us from our sins, now you have returned.

You've come home to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. He came to bring us home to where we belong, to where we were created to be, not tortured souls, not just flourishing, but withering like the grass of the field, but those who share the glory, the eternal glory of true humanity, the humanity that's seen only in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to share it forever in the place where there is no more death, no more rupture of those precious relationships.

Peter says, when the chief shepherd appears, he will bring that unfading crown of glory to all who are his, to those who have not refused his healing, who have not rejected his offer of grace, but have embraced the grace and mercy of that sin bearer so powerful that he and he alone can truly

bring us home forever, to the home of righteousness, to where God himself dwells, ransomed, healed, restored, because forgiven of our sins, by his wounds you have been healed. If your hope is in Jesus Christ, that's true of you. And that means a new day has dawned. The son of righteousness has risen with healing in his wings for you. Listen to these words. The dawning of a new day. It's the message of a glorious possibility for every kind of need. To the lonely and solitary, it speaks of an ineffable companionship. [29 : 12] Emmanuel, God with us. What a wonderful sunrise that can be. To the old and frail, it brings gentle hands and kind and the strength of the everlasting arms.

To the sorrowing and to the heartbroken, it pledges the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. And to those who have failed and been a disappointment to themselves and to others, beauty for ashes, even here, especially here, the dawning of a new day. Friends, that is the true grace of Christmas. That's what the coming of Jesus into this world means for you. Yes, the full light of God's restoration of righteousness lies in the future. That's true. But the message of Christmas is that already it has begun. Already the future is made certain because of what Christ has done. And then already those who know Jesus have come home now to their true shepherd.

That means already those who follow his lead are touched by his heavenly light. He is bringing healing to their earthly relationships, relationships that were battered and bruised and even completely broken.

[30 : 35] And already there's an invasion of health-giving light into their lives and into their personalities that have begun to transform them and will go on transforming them forever into the image of Jesus himself.

There may be a long way to go. For many of us who are Christians it seems like there's a very long way to go. But just like somebody who has had a lethal cancer removed and cut out from their body, the decisive intervention, has been made.

Now the recovery is assured. They wait with patience that full restoration to health and to strength that is promised. By his wounds you have been healed.

That is the message of Christmas and it is the offer of Christmas. God wants you to know the health and the true healing of his rightness, his salvation. He wants you to know the ultimate healing of his eternal glory. He wants you to know the sunrise of that healing forgiveness in your life now.

[31 : 48] To warm, to soften your heart, to bring things that have been so very wrong and to set them steadily to rights as he touches you in his grace and his mercy.

love. And I think that it's the same thing to do. It's the same thing I think. Isn't it true that so many of us need that healing righteousness to touch our relationships in life? Maybe for you it's a relationship at work or with friends or with a neighbor or with parents or children, perhaps with a brother or a sister, maybe with a spouse.

how painful these ruptures in our lives can be. But the Lord Jesus Christ is a sin bearer so powerful that in bearing your sins away forever, he can touch your life and he can touch your heart with the warmth and the joy of his perfect rightness.

even now, he came to bring restoration. Restoration forever, but a restoration that calls us now to have done with sin and calls us now to live to righteousness because our true home is the home of righteousness with him.

Friends, in the coming of Jesus Christ into this world, there came a sin bearer so powerful that he can and he will restore your true humanity and restore it forever.

[33 : 32] So will you make sure, will you make sure that you have asked him to make you right this Christmas? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that in Jesus Christ, your Son, the day has dawned, the new day of life and light, of the one who has risen with healing in his wings and who offers us and promises us a glory that is unfading, imperishable and undefiled, kept in heaven for all who long for his coming and who trust in his great salvation.

So may we tonight trust in the grace of Jesus Christ, your Son, for we ask it in his name. Amen.