

The Powerful Sin-bearer -- who works full restoration

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] God said, let us make men in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created men 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 guard it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, you may surely eat of every tree in 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. A picture there of the world as it was meant to be, as God created it to be, as we would love it to be.

Everything is right. Peace, perfect harmony, male and female, of mankind and nature, and between man and God.

[1 : 23] 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?

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 serpent, 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.

[2 : 41] 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.

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 shall 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.

[3 : 55] A curse upon human relationships. A curse upon nature. A curse upon our very lives.

To dust you shall return. And that's the world we actually know. As the Bible puts it, through the fear of death. People are subject to lifelong slavery.

But as you heard there, even as that curse was pronounced, God promised that darkness, that evil would not have the last word. That God himself would intervene.

Through the seed of the woman. To at last destroy the work of the devil. To liberate, to redeem his people. And down through the darkness of human history, that promise shone and shone. Until at last, at the first Christmas, that promised offspring came to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray.

[4 : 56] Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor 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.

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.

[5 : 57] 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 on them knows peace.

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.

[7 : 03] That's a grim reading, isn't it? And you see, the Bible isn't ancient history.

The picture that Isaiah the prophet presents there, it just describes very accurately the contemporary world that we know only too well. Just as it did the world of his day.

And that's because human beings haven't changed very much at all in nearly 3,000 years. How great is the world's need of saving from darkness?

From the darkness that comes out of the human heart. But the grace of Christmas is that out of darkness we have light.

And that's why on Christmas night all Christians sing. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, the father of David.

[8 : 02] And a branch from his roots 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. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist. And faithfulness the belt of his loins.

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 hard 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.

[9 : 03] 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. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.

Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. And they shall obtain gladness and joy. And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah the prophet saw so clearly the bitter truth of the world of humanity as it really is. And yet that was the same prophet also telling us that one day sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

[10 : 08] To be replaced by everlasting joy. Because he knew that God had promised a savior to restore all things. And the last one would arise.

The seed of the woman. A shoot, he says, from King David's line. David's descendant. But he also called him the root of David because he is the root of all things.

He will be God with us. Armed with his righteousness as a breastplate. With his salvation as a helmet. With power to bear away sin.

And so to reverse the curse of sin. God himself will make all things right. And then, as the prophet said, Then, his blessings will flow far as the curse is found.

And that's why Christmas is indeed a message of joy to the world. Isaiah promised that God himself would intervene one day to restore all things.

[11 : 15] That his own arm would bring salvation. And Peter, the apostle of Christ, he tells us how that was actually fulfilled. He tells us that it was accomplished only as God, the great savior, became incarnate.

And came in the flesh, in the person of his son, Jesus. To be himself the great sin bearer. Listen to Peter's words. He, Jesus himself, bore our sins in 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 lost sheep.

But have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Peter's telling us there's light. There's joy in Jesus' birth. But there are also clouds of great darkness for Jesus himself. Who was born to die as the powerful sin bearer.

[12 : 25] Or this babe. Still an infant crying. Shadows of the cross were lying. Well, the apostle Peter, in speaking of the grace that Christmas brings to our world.

He tells us that Jesus Christ was born in order to be a powerful sin bearer. Who is uniquely able to bring restoration to the true human life that we were created for.

But of course, which we've spoiled so bitterly through our rebellion against God. And that's what the Bible means by the word sin. That spoiling rebellion against our creator.

And Peter tells us three things very clearly in those two verses that we read together. About why Jesus came into the world to die on the cross. To die on the tree, as Peter calls it. And I like to focus on these things this Christmas Eve.

So that we can be absolutely clear. What the true apostles of Jesus Christ actually taught about what his life was about. And what his death was about. So important, isn't it?

[13 : 33] To go to the primary sources yourself. To find out what the gospel of Jesus Christ is. That's the scriptures. And just listen to some church leader somewhere.

Make sure you want to know what Christianity really is all about. Well, let's hear what Peter tells us. And the first thing is that he says Jesus came into our world to bring healing.

To bring a true healing of ultimate reconciliation for humanity. By his wounds, says Peter, you have been healed.

He's clearly not talking when he says that about mere medical matters. Mere physical healing in that sense. Now he's alluding directly to the prophet Isaiah. Who so famously spoke about God's anointed servant.

Who would suffer for his people's ultimate healing. I'm sure many of you will know the chorus from Handel's Messiah. That proclaims those very words. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

[14 : 39] And Isaiah there goes on to say he was wounded for our transgressions. That is our rebellion against God's good and perfect rule. And he was crushed, says Isaiah, for our iniquities.

The deep unfaithfulness that utterly ruptured that relationship with God. And by his stripes you are healed.

You see, by his wounds you have been healed, says Peter. And when you say that our human world is in desperate need of healing.

True and deep healing. I think unless we live with our heads either in the clouds or in the sand. It's hard to think otherwise, isn't it? Just read the news. Listen to the news. If you can bear to.

See, the Bible is a real book. It's about the real world. It tells us as it is. It doesn't pull any punches. Think of those words that we heard earlier also from the prophet Isaiah.

[15 : 42] They certainly tell us, don't they, of a world that needs healing. Just like our world still today. A world full of violence. Of evil. Exploitation of the innocent.

Their feet run to evil. They are swift to shed innocent blood, he said. The way of peace they have not known. We can sing about peace on earth at Christmas, can't we?

But there's precious little peace in Ukraine and many other places. Precious little desire for peace, it seems. World leaders just clamoring for more and more war.

Or as Isaiah said again, righteousness stands afar off. Truth has stumbled in the public square.

Well, we live with bitter disillusionment, don't we?

About public life and so much of the world. In the oldest, in the most liberal democracies. Truth is all but lacking, isn't it? From our government, from our media.

[16:42] No one says Isaiah goes to law honestly. They rely on empty pleas. They speak lies.

They conceive mischief. They give birth to iniquity. You might think he's been writing that about current governments and current elections and corruption in public life.

Think of the latest scandal there is with the European Union. But in fact, he wrote all of those things 3,000 years ago. You see, the truth about our world is that human beings haven't changed at heart. Not at all. Not since those ancient days. The issues that face 21st century humanity are exactly the same issues that face mankind in the 8th century BC. And in every century in between.

Because we share a common humanity. We share a human nature. And that nature is damaged, isn't it? It's been corrupted.

It's diseased. It needs healing. And the Bible tells us why. Listen again to Isaiah. Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.

[17:48] And your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. According to the Bible, you see, that is the real root problem of humanity.

All humanity throughout all history. In every culture. Every nation. Every people on this earth. And that fundamental distance between us and our creator.

That is the heart of what the Bible calls sin. And when the most precious, the most basic, the most fundamental relationship in life ruptures.

Well, there's an inevitable trail of tragedy. We know that, don't we, in our own experience. For example, when there's a rupture of that fundamental relationship of marriage.

Can't but bring agonizing pain, can it, to a whole family. Even to communities. And when that's widespread, to whole societies. Terrible pain. See, that is the story of humanity, according to the Bible.

[18:51] Genesis 3, we heard, tells of that great rupture between God and man. When human beings reject the gracious rule and the blessings of God.

And put themselves at odds with God. And immediately, if you read on, Genesis chapter 4 tells a story of the vicious aftermath of that. Man at odds with man.

Brother at odds with brother. Killing one another. On and on it goes. And the message is clear. See, when human beings usurp the place of God. When they banish him from their lives.

Well, the beautiful reign of a sovereign God is exchanged for the beastly reign of selfish human beings. And the relational holocaust that follows on from that.

That is what explains our world. Relationship breakdown. Relationship rupture. That's at the heart, isn't it? Of all our world's problems. Think of nations at odds with nations.

[19:48] And trade wars. And currency wars. And real shooting wars. Or races at odds with races. Leading to all kinds of exploitation and resentment that lasts in cultures for generations.

And centuries even. Or think of the strife between employers and employees. That's all around us at the moment. All the misery and all the strife of the strikes. And man at odds with women.

And all the catastrophic epidemics of relational breakdown and family rupture. Damaged children and so on that we see. And even if some of us may live, I'm sure we do, rather charmed lives.

Perhaps insulated from many of these things in our own lives. Because none of us, none of us can avoid the greatest and the most painful relationship rupture of all. And that is death itself.

Death robs us, doesn't it? Of our nearest. Of our dearest. Of the most precious relationships we will ever have in life. And surely at this time of year at Christmas, those things are most poignant and most painful.

[20:55] When we're conscious, aren't we, of the dark shadow of death. When we remember Christmas's past. And we remember those now who are so painfully absent from our table.

And something deep down within us groans. At the scandal of that. And we know it just shouldn't be like that. Our whole world is so wrong.

It's so sick. It needs healing desperately. You see, all of these things that we see, they're just symptoms caused by the ultimate rupture right at the heart of our universe.

And that is human beings being in rebellion against God, our Creator. And no power on earth can possibly cure that.

We've got the United Nations. We've got the G7. We've got the European Union. We've got the World Economic Forum. We've got all these things. Have they cured the world?

[21 : 57] Some of them have nearly destroyed it in their folly, haven't they? Nothing on this world can help us.

And God saw, said Isaiah the prophet, that there was no man. There was no one to intercede for humanity's sickness. There was no one to bring healing. And so he said his own arm brought salvation.

He put on righteousness as a breastplate. He put on a helmet of salvation on his head to fight for us. God himself, God himself, in the person of his incarnate son, Jesus Christ, he came to do what no man could ever do.

To bring healing. To bring salvation. But it was at infinite cost to himself. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, says Peter.

By his wounds you have been healed. It required, you see, a sin bearer so powerful that he could bear away such sin and bring the true healing of ultimate reconciliation.

[23 : 11] Between utterly unfaithful human beings and an utterly faithful God. And we know that, don't we? We know that it must be the one who has sinned against in any relationship breakdown due to unfaithfulness.

It can be only the person who has sinned against who can offer true reconciliation. And there's no such thing, is there, as cheap forgiveness. It is a costly, costly thing to forgive and reconcile in that way.

Which is why it's so very rare that it happens. But God himself, says Peter, in Jesus Christ his son, shed his own infinitely precious blood, as Peter calls it.

To bring true healing. Ultimate reconciliation with the God who created us. So great is his faithfulness. So great is his love for us.

And so that means, you see, secondly, according to Peter, that Jesus came into the world to bring us health. The true health of ultimate righteousness.

[24 : 17] Jesus came to make all things right again. His coming heralds the dawning of a new day of life. As life was meant to be.

Where righteousness, where right reigns. That is where everything, again, is in right relationship with God and with all human beings. He came that we might die to sin, says Peter.

That we might depart from that dark existence forever. And instead that we might live to righteousness. With all things right. Not just to deal with the symptoms of the world's disease.

But to bring total restoration of God's rightness. To undo that curse of separation between man and God. That turned God's face away from us.

That left us floundering in our own mess. And to make all things utterly right forever. That's what righteousness is. It's rightness. Everything put right at root cause.

[25 : 19] So the fruit of that righteousness really is the healing of this whole universe. And that fruit begins to be seen everywhere again. Just like when somebody has terminal heart failure.

They're weak and they're blue and they're pale and they're bloated and they're breathless. But when they have a heart transplant. The strength comes back.

And the color comes back. And the breath comes back. Because life has come back once again to the heart of their being. What Peter is talking about is nothing less than the rebirth.

Just like that. Of this whole universe. That the prophets longed for. We heard about it earlier. In that day the wilderness shall be glad.

The desert shall bloom abundantly. They shall rejoice with joy and singing. And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. And the eyes of the blind opened. And sorrow and sighing will flee away forever.

[26 : 22] Because of the prophet God will come and save you. That's real health. Ultimate rightness. A writing of all that is wrong in this dark sinful world.

And that's what the prophets promised was to come. That's where the Bible story ends. The very end in John's vision in Revelation.

With the glory of a new heavens and a new earth. And we're told there that God will forever be with his people. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more.

And there shall be no more mourning or crying anymore. For the former things have passed away. And you see my friends.

In the coming of Jesus Christ. The great healer. As the sin bearer. So powerful. The light of that new day of health. Of ultimate righteousness.

[27 : 17] It's already dawned. It's not yet fully here. Of course. Peter's plain about that. There's no wishful thinking or pretense like that in the Bible.

It's not yet our bodily possession. But. Because of Christ's accomplished work. On the tree. On the cross. Sin has been dealt with.

And Peter says we have a living hope. And that salvation. That ultimate righteousness. Is ready to be revealed. He says at the last time. At the revelation of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ returns to reign. It's not yet the full brightness of that glorious day. But. But the sure light of dawn has come.

That's. That's what Zechariah. The father of John the Baptist. Was singing about. In Jesus' birth. He said in the coming of Jesus. God has given knowledge of salvation.

[28 : 16] To his people. And the forgiveness of their sins. So the sunrise. Has visited us. From on high. To give light. To those who are sitting in darkness. And in the shadow of death.

He came to bring us 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. And death's dark shadows. Put to flight. And so finally you see. This verse tells us.

That Jesus came into this world. To bring us home. He came to bring us home. To our true home. Of ultimate restoration. Home to the lordship. To the leadership.

To the care and the protection. Of the great shepherd. God. The eternal son himself. Once he said. You were straying like lost sheep. You were helpless.

[29 : 11] You were hopeless. In a world out of control. Isn't our world out of control? But now he says. Because of the one. Who has healed you.

You have returned. You've come home. To the shepherd. To the overseer. Of your souls. He came to bring us home. To where we belong. To what we were created to be.

Not tortured souls. Fading and withering. Like grass in the field. But those who. Who share. Who reflect. The glory.

Of true humanity. The true humanity. That we see. In the person. Of our lord Jesus Christ. And he came. That we would share that. Forever. And ever.

Where there is no. More. Death. Peter says. When the chief shepherd appears. The end of his letter. He says. He will bring. This unfading.

[30 : 09] Crown of glory. For all who are his. To those who have embraced. The grace and mercy. Of the great healer. Who alone. Can truly bring us home.

Can bring us home forever. To that home of righteousness. We're ransomed. We're healed. We're restored. Because we are forgiven. For our sins.

By his wounds. You have been healed. If your hope is in Jesus Christ. Christ. And that means. A new day has dawned. It means. The son of righteousness. Has risen.

With true healing. In his wings. That is the grace. That the message of Christmas brings. That's what the coming of Jesus means. For this world. And for you.

If you believe and trust in him. Yes. Of course. The full light of God's restoration. Of righteousness. Is still in the future. But you see.

[31 : 03] The message of Christmas. Tells us. It's already begun. Already. That future. Is made certain. Because of what Jesus did. On the tree. And already.

Those who know Jesus. Have come home. To their true shepherd. To their leader. To their Lord. Who will lead them. In life. And lead them forever. And so already.

Those who follow his lead. They're being touched. By his healing light. He's bringing healing. Into their earthly relationships. To relationships. Maybe that were battered.

That were bruised. Sometimes were. Were breached completely. Often completely. And utterly broken. But already. There's an invasion. Of that health.

Giving light. Into their lives. And into their personalities. And it's begun. To transform them. And it will keep on. Transforming them. Forever and ever. Into his likeness.

[32 : 01] That's what it means. To be a believer. In Jesus Christ. Today. Yes. Of course. There may be a long. Long way to go. But like somebody. Who's.

Who's had that lethal. Cancer. Cut out of their body. The decisive. Intervention. It's been done. And now the recovery. It's assured.

And they're just waiting. With patience. The true restoration. Of health and strength. By his wounds. You have been. Healed.

Friends. God wants you to know. The healing. That true health. Of his righteousness. His salvation. He wants you to know. The ultimate healing.

Of his eternal glory. But he also wants to know. You to know. Even now. The sunrise. Of that healing. Forgiveness. In your life. Today. And every day. To warm your heart.

[32 : 55] To soften your heart. To bring things. That have. Have been so very wrong. In your life. And to set them right. And start steadily. Putting them to right.

By his tender mercy. There's so many of us. I'm sure. Right here this evening. Who need that. That healing. Rightness.

To touch. Relationships. In our own lives. Maybe it's with. Somebody. Who's a friend of yours. Maybe it's somebody. You work with. Perhaps it's somebody. In your family. Maybe it's even somebody.

Very close to you. A son. Or a daughter. Or a parent. Or a spouse. How painful. Those ruptures can be. But the Lord Jesus.

Is a sin bearer. So. Powerful. In bearing your sins. Away forever. That he can touch. Our hearts. Our lives. And your heart. And your life.

[33 : 48] He can touch it. With the warmth. And with the joy. Of his perfect rightness. Even now. Like the rays. Of the sun. Rising above the horizon.

He came. To bring. Restoration. Restoration forever. But a restoration. That calls us now. To have done with sin. And to start living today.

For rightness. Now. Because our true home. Is the home of righteousness. Our true home. Is not. A harbor of wrong.

Like so much of this world. In the coming of Jesus. Into our world. There came. So. Powerful. A sin bearer. That he can.

And he will restore us. To true humanity. Beginning now. But lasting. Forever. And ever. And my prayer for all of you.

[34 : 44] Listening this evening. Is that you make sure. That you've asked the Lord Jesus Christ. To begin. To make you right. Like that.

This Christmas. And if you do. He will start right now. And he will never. Ever. Come to an end. Until you are like him.

Forever. Amen.