

Look! He's everything you could not be (full atonement 1)

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[0 : 00] It is indeed a very fine hymn, isn't it? Do turn with me to Matthew chapter 3. After the birth stories of chapter 1 and 2, we have Matthew telling us of the people of Israel being confronted by their king.

And I guess the title this week would have to be this. Look, he's everything you can never be. Or perhaps more simply, just two words, full atonement.

I want to say two things by way of introduction this morning. The subject of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ has always been at the very heart of the Christian gospel.

It's at the heart of our faith that this great, this once for all exchange, in which God intervened in history to punish sin once and for all.

To vent his wrath, his holy and righteous wrath, his anger against humanity's heinous rebellion, against our sin, against his rule.

[1 : 19] That intervention to punish, and yet for that punishment not to fall upon us who deserved it, but to fall upon his own son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That he, our God, should himself bear the punishment for our sin. That is a great exchange at the very heart of the gospel. Paul sums it up in one verse in 2 Corinthians 5.21 when he says, For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And this great mystery is the very heart of the gospel that, as John says in John 3.16, God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

Not that he just sent him, but that he gave him the sinners. To stand in their place, to stand under God's wrath, to bring them to God.

And yet, this great cardinal doctrine of what we call substitutionary atonement. That, as Peter puts it in 1 Peter 3, that Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous.

[2 : 37] Substitution, to bring us to God. This great doctrine has been under attack many, many times in the history of the Christian church. Why is that? Well, there are many reasons, but the primary one is simply this.

That people cannot stomach the idea of a God who is angry. Of a God who is full of wrath against sin.

Of a God who demands punishment for sin. It seems very distasteful. It seems, to some, incompatible with the God of love.

It seems so different. But, as we said last week, if we think like that, it simply does betray the fact that we don't take sin nearly as seriously as God does.

We tend to think of it as rather trivial problem. But, unfortunately, God sees it very differently. And that's why John the Baptist's message, remember, verse 7, was a very stark message.

[3 : 41] It was about fleeing from the wrath to come. And it was real wrath he was talking about. Not some pretend watered down wrath.

I guess if you've never seen a tidal wave, a tsunami, when you saw that thing rising up on the horizon, well, you didn't take it all that seriously. You had no conception of just what absolute horror and devastation was right now going to be upon you.

And so it is with an attitude to sin that doesn't take any notice of what Scripture says about God's hatred for sin. About God's zeal for his own holiness.

And his total unwillingness to have anything to do with the blot of our sins and transgressions. It was Anselm of Canterbury that said that if we simply think God can forgive us in the same way as we are to forgive other people, then we simply have yet to begin to consider the sinfulness and the seriousness of sin.

An evangelical faith, you see, has always stood on the Scripture and what it says about sin and redemption. And it has always stood on the substitutionary, atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 05] But recently, controversy has arisen again in evangelical circles about this. It has arisen out of a book by the well-known broadcaster Steve Chalk, a book called The Lost Message of Jesus.

And in that book, I don't want to go into details, but he rejects completely this great doctrine. He claims that it is neither evangelical or biblical. Indeed, he scorns it and disdains it.

Now, I don't want to get into a discussion of his personal view, or even of him as a person. I have no axe to grind against Steve Chalk. However, I raise it because this is simply a resurfacing of the old liberalism of the 19th century.

And that liberalism was the thing which was largely responsible for the death of the gospel in this country, in the mainstream established churches. It led the church away from preaching a message about eternity, about forgiveness, about justification, about the life to come.

It led the church into just nothing more than a social gospel, a gospel that focuses just on this life, and totally ignores eternal issues. And as a result of that, for many, many, many decades, the gospel became buried and lost in the churches of our nation.

[6 : 29] And it is that kind of thinking and that kind of theology which has led to the state that we see in our national church and in the mainline denominations in Scotland today and in the United Kingdom as a whole.

That's the first thing I want to say by way of introduction. The second is this. Just during our team meeting the other day, I mis-made the comment that many people often struggle to explain the gospel from one of the gospels.

Often we find ourselves having to go to the apostle Paul, to his doctrine in his epistles. We find the gospel narratives themselves quite difficult to understand and to explain coherently the message of the Christian gospel.

That's one reason, by the way, why Christianity Explored is such a great thing, because it takes people through Mark's gospel and shows how clearly Mark preaches the gospel in his gospel.

But it is true that often we find it difficult and it does give ammunition to those people who want to drive a wedge between Paul and Jesus. You know the kind of people who say, well, Paul came along and perverted the gospel.

[7 : 38] Now, we want to get back to the authentic Jesus, so let's go to the gospels. And we find in the gospels it's not about atonement for sin. No, it's about helping the poor. It's about feeding the hungry. It's about healing.

And the Lord Jesus there is an example for us. And we have to aspire to be like him and do what he does. And so the gospel becomes nothing more than just trying to do what Jesus teaches us to do, living a good life.

Jesus becomes an example. He becomes a teacher, a model, an inspirer, anything but a saviour from sin. So with these two concerns in view, I want to show you this morning, hopefully with some clarity, how even at the very start of Matthew's gospel, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the beginning of his life of service, already he is pointing us with a single-minded purpose at the atonement of Jesus, at his death for sin.

But it's the same gospel that we find here in Matthew as we find in Paul and in Peter. And it's the same gospel that the apostolic faith has preserved all down the centuries.

The same gospel that is at the very heart of the evangelical faith today. Last week we read chapter 3 verses 1 to 12.

[9 : 03] And we remember John's message was very clear, wasn't it? In verse 2, Repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's upon you. It's a fire. A fire of purging and a fire of judgment.

But the question must be how? How is this fire going to purify people? Or how is Matthew 1.21 going to be true? That Jesus is so named because he's going to save his people from their sins.

Well, certainly the Old Testament in its entirety had promised this. That salvation would come. That God would have a holy and righteous people.

Deuteronomy 26 verse 19. God promises Israel, he says this, that people shall be a people holy to the Lord. That they shall be a people to keep his commandments. That they shall be lifted high and praised and honoured.

But how? How is that going to happen? Well, of course, in the Old Testament all the sacrifices and the offerings spoke of a real forgiveness. But at the same time, the fact that they had to be repeated again and again, every day and every month and every year, well, they also spoke of the fact that sin was never got rid of for good.

[10 : 17] And so together, all of that pointed forward. It was looking, promising a fulfilment, but looking for it. Looking for the ultimate day when all of these things promised about forgiveness and about the people becoming holy would actually happen.

And so, when John comes along and says, the amazing day of the Lord is going to be upon us. He's coming with a message not of despair, not of utter despair in the face of the coming wrath of God, no, but a message of hope.

Because he's saying the day of the Lord has come and the Saviour has come. The one who fulfills all this promise of forgiveness. Yes, he's saying the King is coming.

He's coming to confront his subjects. He's telling you to repent because you're everything you shouldn't be. Yes, that's true. But there's more than that. He's saying, look, look at the King.

He is everything that you can never be. And he is all of that for you, for your sake. He is the fulfilment of all God's promise to deal with your sin forever.

[11 : 31] That's what he is. And he is the fulfilment of all God's promise that his people would at last be holy. Look, says Matthew, that's what he's saying. He's making abundantly clear who it is.

He's saying, this is the King. This is great David's greatest son. That was so clear. We saw it in chapter 1 and 2 at Christmas time. But see also, he's saying, what this King is coming to do.

He's coming to serve you. He's coming to save you. He's the servant King. He's the King who's coming to win your salvation. So, let's look at the text in front of us, verses 13 to 17, to see what Matthew's telling us about the work, about the mission of this coming King.

And we're going to see it's all about substitution. It's all about the Lord Jesus Christ in our place, in his death and in his life. And it's all for us.

That's what Matthew's telling us. That's what the baptism of Jesus is about. That's what the temptation is about too. We'll see that next time. But today there's really just one big point.

[12 : 47] Let me summarise it using Paul's words. For our sake, he who knew no sin became sin. Jesus' baptism, you see, heralds the truth about his mission.

The mission of God's beloved Son. He came, as Paul puts it, in the likeness of sinful flesh that God might condemn sin in the flesh. Or he came, as the prophet Isaiah put it, to bear his people's iniquities.

John's told us, you see, that Jesus came to be the baptiser with fire of the Holy Spirit. He's the Holy One of God. He's the messenger of the covenant. He's the one who's coming to usher in his kingdom. And so everybody must repent.

in the face of his coming. That's why verse 13 is such a big surprise, isn't it? Why on earth did he come to be baptized? That seems extraordinary.

And verse 14 tells us it wasn't just us that thought it extraordinary. John seemed to be rather surprised too. He says, it's me who needs your baptism of fire. I need what you can give.

[13 : 53] Why on earth are you coming for my baptism? You don't need to repent. Don't be ridiculous. Don't be scandalous. There's something obscene about him coming.

This is wrong. It seems that even John, who Jesus said was the greatest of the prophets, even he hasn't quite yet grasped the depth of what's going on here. He knows that Jesus is the Messiah.

He knows he's becoming king. It just seems that he hasn't quite grasped yet the profundity of his mission. He hasn't quite plumbed the depths of the cost to God of Jesus' mission.

But that, you see, is what John is seeing here. And that's what Matthew is revealing to us. Verses 16 and 17, you see, really give us the meaning. They open it up for us.

Here we see an extraordinary spectacle. We've got the triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together, united right at the beginning of the Lord Jesus Christ's work of redemption. We've got God the Son stepping out on his road to the cross, the road to winning his people's salvation.

[15 : 06] We've got God the Spirit anointing him with power for his service, for his task. We've got the Father himself speaking out of heaven, appointing the Son, approving him and his work.

And verse 17, you see, is of great, great significance. This is my beloved Son, with whom I'm well pleased. What's the Lord God saying there from heaven?

Well, he's putting together two very, very important words from the Old Testament scriptures. This is my beloved Son. That's the great announcement from Psalm 2. Do you remember when we studied it?

I have installed my King on Zion's hill. The Son says, the Lord said to me, behold, you are my Son. Today I have begotten you.

And John is saying, Matthew is saying to us, this Jesus is the one in whom all those messianic hopes are fulfilled. This is God's Son.

[16 : 11] This is the Son in David's line, fulfilled at last. He is my beloved Son. But the second half of this statement comes from another place.

It comes from Isaiah chapter 42, verse 1. It's the first of the great servant songs of Isaiah. Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights, or in whom I am well pleased.

And that's Isaiah's promise of the servant who is going to be the one who suffers God's people. He's going to be the sin bearer. He's going to be the one who takes away sin.

And you see what God the Father is saying. He's bringing together two great strands of the whole Old Testament promise and prophecy. Two strands that before this could never have been seen to be put together, could never have been held together.

God's great, exalted, holy Son who would reign, and God's despised, abused, hated, sin bearing servant who would atone for his people.

[17 : 25] And he's saying both of these come together and are fulfilled in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the king whose rule is going to be extended through all the universe, but that's going to happen by his serving his people, by his suffering for them.

God's glorious Son who's going to rule the universe for eternity, he is going to be the suffering sin bearer. That's the astonishing thing that God the Father is saying.

Isn't that scandalous? Do you see why the people would have found that so extraordinary? But you see what Matthew is telling us is right from the very, very beginning of Jesus' ministry, he was conscious that that was what his calling was.

He was acutely conscious of what he had come to the world to do and of what it was going to cost him. It just makes a nonsense, doesn't it, of the kind of people who say, well of course Jesus grew up and he thought he was going to have a great mission and gather followers and take over the country and then it all went wrong and he got depressed and discouraged and then ended up going for martyrdom.

What a lot of nonsense. Right from the very beginning, he came from the Galilee to John to be baptized. That's why he came. Verse 15 makes it abundantly clear that he knew exactly why it was and he tells us he must be baptized, he says, to fulfill all righteousness.

[19 : 02] Now there's no doubt Jesus wanted to affirm John's ministry. That's one reason why he came. But there's much, much more than that. Do you remember we've seen this word all the way through Matthew's account so far, fulfill.

He's the one who's going to fulfill all that the Old Testament promised. In other words, he's going to bring it to completion. He's going to accomplish all that's been promised.

And what Jesus is saying is, he must be baptized in the place of sinners to accomplish God's righteousness for his people. To accomplish God's right relationship with his people, a right relationship of holiness.

God's righteousness is his salvation. He must be baptized with sinners to accomplish God's great plan of salvation at last from sin and rebellion.

John says, he comes to baptize with the fire of cleansing and of life. Jesus is saying, yes, but that's accomplished as I suffer and bear the sins of my people.

[20 : 18] Notice we're not told that Jesus came to confess his sin or to repent. Matthew's very carefully told us that the people all came confessing. No confession here.

Why? Because it's not his sin. He knew no sin. Even in Matthew chapter 27 when he stands before Pilate, Pilate says, what's wrong with you?

This man has done nothing wrong. Now you see, right from the beginning Jesus knew he wasn't coming in to be baptized for his own sin, but for his people's sins.

He was made sin for us. And that's what the servant of God had promised he would do. Turn back to Isaiah chapter 53 because it's such an important chapter underlying what's going on here.

Isaiah 53 is the fourth of the great servant songs. It's the greatest of them all. And that's the background of Jesus' words here. It's a passage all about substitution.

[21 : 18] Look at verse 4. What does the servant do? He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Verse 6. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Verse 8. He was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. Verse 10. It was the will of the Lord to crush him.

He has put him to grief when his soul makes an offering for sin or makes a guilt offering. And especially verse 11.

out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous.

How? Because of verse 12. He poured out his soul to death. He was numbered with the transgressors. He bore the sin of many. You see, Jesus is saying, that's me.

[22 : 27] That's my work. That's what I'm going to fulfill. That's what I'm going to accomplish. And even John is shocked by this. But the heavens themselves open.

And God the Father says, yes, it's true. He's my beloved son. But he's my servant. And I delight in him.

He's come to accomplish my salvation. He's come to accomplish, to fulfill all righteousness. Yes, he's standing in the place of sinners to bear their sin.

He's to be the guilt offering that Isaiah spoke of. And the guilt offering, if you read about it in Leviticus chapter 5, is the most comprehensive of all the offerings.

It's a sacrifice that involves not just a penalty for sin, but also a restitution, a restoration, a place of righteousness. And yes, says God the Father, it's he, my son, is going to be the guilt offering to accomplish all righteousness.

[23 : 36] The very next words in Isaiah 42 from this are, I have put my spirit on him. And so the Holy Spirit here comes down in verse 16 and he says, yes, I too am affirming this.

And that's why I'm anointing him for service. He comes down as the dove, the symbol and sign of peace with God, the sign of new creation. Remember the dove came at the end of the flood, signifying the beginning of a whole new world.

In Genesis chapter 1 we have the picture of the Holy Spirit fluttering is the word, hovering over the chaos and darkness of the deep. Pictures of a bird fluttering over its young.

Through the Spirit's work, out of chaos and nothingness, a new creation is made. And here the Spirit comes upon the Lord Jesus Christ at the beginning of his work. To speak of a work of peace with God, of a new creation.

The dove also was a sacrificial animal. And the Spirit here is anointing our Lord Jesus Christ for sacrifice. Jesus' baptism, you see, is a foretaste of his coming death.

[24 : 48] It's a foretaste of the baptism of fire coming at his cross. That's what Matthew is telling us here, right at the start of Jesus' ministry. And that's why the heavens open as a foretaste of what the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ accomplishes.

This is the counterpart of what happens, remember, when Jesus dies and we read in Matthew 27 that the curtain of the temple was torn in two, the thing that separated heaven from earth. And here, right at the beginning, Matthew is saying, because the Lord Jesus Christ stood in the place of sinners, bore their iniquities as a guilt offering, the heavens have been opened.

And the way back to God is clear. He was baptized with all that is ours by right, the sin, the guilt, the wrath of God, so that we might be baptized with all that's his by rights, the approval and the delight of the Father, the presence, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ stands in our place so that we might stand in his place. That's what he came to accomplish, that's what he came to fulfill, that's the work of fulfillment.

He came, verse 13, to be baptized, in order that, verse 15, he might accomplish all righteousness and do it for us. Because, you see, the great prophetic hope, the cleansing, the renewing, the purifying, the outpouring of the Spirit of God, the thing that would bring in the new covenant, the thing that would make new people, the thing that would usher in the new creation, all of that, Jesus is saying, can only be fulfilled, can only be accomplished through my death in the place of sinners.

[26 : 40] Only through the atoning, substituting sacrifice of Christ, where he who knew no sin was made sin, that we might in him become the righteousness of God.

That's what the baptism of Jesus is all about. That's what it signifies right at the beginning, at the outset of his ministry. It points us right away to the climax of his ministry, to the cross. Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place, condemned, he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood.

Hallelujah, what a saviour. Matthew's Jesus, you see, is the king who's come to usher in his kingdom, yes, but he's right from the start, the suffering king.

He's the sin-bearing king, he's the saviour king. There's no other way. That's why when Steve Chalk and others who criticise evangelicals for having a focus on the cross, when they complain, oh, it's ridiculous to focus on just such a tiny bit of Jesus' life, when he had a whole 33 years of life, with so much to learn from.

That's why he's so wrong. Because gospel writers focus precisely there. We get absolutely nothing at all in Matthew's gospel, or in Luke's gospel about Jesus' life after his birth.

[28 : 12] For 30 years, until here. We don't get anything at all in Mark or in John's gospel. Even what we do have of Jesus' three-year ministry is so condensed that we have really the happenings of just a few days.

And the vast weight of all the materials in the gospel is focused on one week of Jesus' life, the last week leading up to his death, his resurrection. So don't blame us.

If we're centred on the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but in the apostles, but in the gospel writers. That's what the scriptures focus on. All four of the evangelists draw our attention very specially to this momentous event at the start of Jesus' ministry.

The whole trinity all together endorsing and focusing on what Jesus has come to do, accomplish his guilt offering.

And they're all telling us what Matthew makes very explicit here. They're all telling us that the fulfilling of all righteousness only happens because of what Jesus comes to do.

[29 : 21] That the only way to the fulfilment of every plan and purpose and promise of God is through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ where he takes our place. From the very beginning of human history, everything has been moving to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the very beginning of the Christian scriptures, from Genesis all the way through, everything is moving to centre upon the events that took place at Calvary.

The coming cross of Jesus is a debt for sin. And the coming cross of Jesus is the means by which God makes many to be righteous.

in his sight. The Father calls and approves him, the Spirit anoints him to lead him to the cross. So that he might become the baptiser with the Spirit.

That's why it's very significant, isn't it? At the end of Matthew chapter 28, we have Jesus commanding his followers to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel and baptise people in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 29] But that great outpouring of the Spirit, that great baptism can only come because Jesus of the baptism to undergone. The baptism of his death in the cross.

Isaiah 52 says, So shall he, my servant, baptise, sprinkle many nations. How? Only because he will bear their iniquities.

Only because he will be counted with the transgressors. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, says the hymn. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

He came to be the sin bearer. He came for our sake. He who knew no sin was made sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That's absolutely central to Matthew's gospel. It's absolutely central to the whole New Testament gospel. It's the only gospel. And without that, there is no gospel at all.

[31 : 32] It's true that that's not all there is to the gospel. The atonement is about more than just God dealing with the guilt of sin. Yes, there's many facets.

There's great richness in the Bible's doctrine of the atonement. You've got to think about the redemption from the power of sin, of reconciliation with God, of adoption, regeneration.

All of these things, of course, are part of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. But salvation from the guilt and the penalty of sin is right at the heart of it.

And it's never, ever less than that. It's true also that there's more to the obedience of Christ on our behalf than just this, what the theologians call his passive obedience, that is his death for sins.

There's the whole other side of the guilt offering. There's the restitution. There's his perfect life, what we call his active obedience. We'll see that next time in the whole story of the temptation. And it's intimately connected with this, of course.

[32 : 33] But nevertheless, I'll say it again, Christ's work as the sin bearer, sin bearer, to free us from the guilt and the penalty of sin, is the very heart of the New Testament Gospel.

It's the heart of the atonement. Matthew records John's baptism here at the very outset, to point us to that cross, to flag us, flag up for us, his overwhelming concern right at the beginning that Christ came to stand in the place of sinners.

And we've got to take note of that. We don't grasp the importance that Matthew and the other Gospel writers and the Apostles, that they place on this sin bearing work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will be totally at sea in our own understanding of what our mission is meant to be about. We'll never understand what we as Christians are meant to be doing with the Gospel.

But when we do grasp that, everything else falls into place. Let me just end by giving three implications. It gives us very clearly the priority of the Gospel.

[33 : 46] The Gospel for Matthew and for the whole Trinity, as we see here, is all about addressing issues of eternal importance to God. That is, it's about the issue of the sin of man.

Everything else is secondary. Everything else is peripheral. Everything else almost fades into oblivion in comparison with that. We'll see next time how resolutely Jesus resists the devil's temptation to turn away from that and to other things.

But from the beginning, everything's been heading to the cross. All the way through Scripture. And all the way through the Gospels. And our Gospel commission is the Gospel of the Cross.

It's a Gospel that deals with the eternal issues. It's a Gospel that's about salvation from sin through Jesus Christ alone. That is the Gospel.

There is no other Gospel. It's about the issues of eternity. And unless we get that hammered into our heads, everything is lost. Everything. Remove the Cross from just Jesus teaching and say what we want is Jesus teaching is what liberal theology has done.

[34 : 59] And where does that lead you? It leads you into a social Gospel that is concerned just with the needs of this world. It focuses on this world. It's about hunger. It's about helping. It's about doing good.

It's about all of these things. But that is not the Gospel. These things are the fruit of the Gospel. And that is what led the Church in this country to lose and abandon the Gospel altogether.

You can't have the teaching of Jesus without the Cross of Jesus. If you remove the Cross from a focus on the Holy Spirit as some have done among the Pentecostal movements, not all but some, then what you get is a focus on experience.

On the here and now. On healing. On whatever it might be. Not on the eternal issues of sin and forgiveness. But the Spirit here comes upon Jesus to lead Jesus to the Cross.

Jesus' teaching is all about leading us to His Cross. And the priority of the Gospel is that it is the Gospel of the Cross.

[36 : 10] the Gospel of the Cross. And if we forget that, however successful our mission may seem to be, however full our Church might become, however great things we might seem to accomplish, and the perspective of eternity was lost everything.

Everything. The priority is that it is the Gospel of the Cross that deals with eternal issues. Secondly, when we get that right, we understand the promise of the Gospel.

Only when the Cross is at the centre do we have the really good news that matters. Do we have the answer to the question, can I really find God? Can I really be right with God? Is there a way to Heaven from this Earth of sadness and sin?

Yes, is the answer. Heaven is opened. Heaven is opened by the atonement of Jesus. Heaven is opened by the Cross of Jesus. Genesis chapter 3 ends, doesn't it, with the way to Heaven barred, the gates closed, the fiery angels and their swords barring the way to Heaven.

But here, the Heavens are opened. And the way back to God is open. Why? Because He stood in the place of sinners.

[37 : 27] Because He came to bear our transgressions. Only through the Cross does that cleansing stream come to us. There's a way back to God, we say, from the dark parts of sin.

There's a door that is open and all may begin. At Calvary's Cross is where it begins. And only there, and whenever the Gospel of the Cross is proclaimed, there the Spirit is at work applying that work of Jesus that leads to the Cross.

Because Jesus was baptized, because He stood in in the place of sinners, that way is open to all believers. The promise of the Gospel. So that if you've not yet come to know God, that door is open for you today.

It's a promise. That's what Jesus' baptism means today for you. Because He stood there doing what you could not do. The gate of heaven is open.

He promises you all that was His. Finally, it ensures that we have the peace of the Gospel. If you're a believer, if you've come to Him, if you've come to the Lord Jesus Christ as your King, if you've bowed the knee to Him to obey Him as Lord, if you've been baptized in His name and in the name of the Father and the Spirit, then Jesus' baptism speaks a great peace to your soul.

[38 : 55] As surely as Jesus was washed in the Jordan River, just as surely your sins have been washed away. He bore your iniquity.

He presented Himself as a perfect guilt offering. And all your sin is gone forever. Cleanse. You might not feel that. You may not feel clean.

You may not feel penitent. Indeed, you can't even repent properly by yourself and turn wholeheartedly to Him. You know that. But He has repented for you in your place.

And not only has your sin been washed away. This is a wonderful thought. Through His knowledge, through His perfect right relationship with His Father, He has made many to be counted righteous.

And if you have believed in Him, He has made you to be counted righteous before His Father. In the New Testament, God will tell us that the heavens have been opened wide.

[39 : 59] And the voice of the Father has declared you to be righteous. Clean. Holy. Do you see that? If everything that you had has been laid upon Him, if He was the sin bearer, then everything that He has has been laid upon you.

And God the Father is speaking out of an open heaven. And He is saying to you, this is my beloved son. This is my beloved daughter.

In you I am well pleased. And that wonderful assurance, that great peace, doesn't rest on our feelings.

It doesn't rest on our sense of our own righteousness. It doesn't rest on our fruitfulness of the believers, God forbid. It all rests on the fact that in the Gospel, Jesus was baptized into a death for sins.

that we might be forgiven. It all rests on the fact that He came to John to be baptized, to stand in the way of sinners, to be numbered with the transgressors.

[41 : 18] That's the Gospel of the Cross. That's the only Gospel. Any other Gospel is in no Gospel at all.

And that's the Gospel committed to us, to take to all the nations. Friends, don't let's ever be ashamed of the Gospel of the Cross of Christ.

For He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we, in Him, might become the righteousness of God. Let's never be ashamed of the Gospel of the Cross.

Amen. Let's pray.