

## **Pardoned by the Cross**

**Ephesians 1:3-10**

**By Dr. James M. Baird**

Let's take our Bibles and turn to the book of Ephesians, the first chapter of the book of Ephesians. Soren Kierkegaard lived in the early part of the 1800's. He likened the passion of the pagans as they worshipped their idol to truth, and the coldness and the indifference of the Christian as they worshipped the true God to error. And he introduced the idea that there was more truth or at least there was truth, in the passion of the pagan. He set passion and involvement against rationality, truth, understanding, orthodoxy, knowing what the Scriptures teach. He did both a service and a disservice to the Church for he opened the way for the existential movement in this century. And we should never be put on the horns of that dilemma. We should have both: it's not either or.

Our text Sunday morning was the Apostle Paul. Listen to the passion in this. The Apostle Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 verse 17, "God forbid that I should glory save or accept in the cross of Jesus Christ." What passion! Now the difference between Paul and Kierkegaard is that Paul goes on and he explains the meaning of the cross. Our passion is not simply that we are to get involved in the things of God and become excited, as many would have in our day. It's not that alone. It is excitement and passion and commitment with knowledge.

So, why are we called to the cross? What is the meaning of the cross? How can I experience the passion if I don't understand? We said Sunday morning that the cross is central to the biblical message. Why is the cross central to the Christian faith and to the Christian? It is because of what God accomplished on the cross. The God that we worship did something for His people on the cross. Hear the word of God. I am going to be continuing this series of sermons, and for the rest of this series of sermons we're going to be dealing with what has been accomplished at the cross that makes it so passionate to us, why we are so desperate to continually come to the cross and to believe in the faith of the Christ who is in the cross and who has died and rose again to give us life and victory. What is it about the cross? Our passage is in Ephesians chapter 1. I'm going to begin reading in verse 3. This will be our text. And I'm going to give you a little background as we go along here, and these are some of the things that God would have us understand that lead to the cross. Verse 3, the first thing that you will understand from this passage is that there is a great God. He is the governor. He is the Lord. He is the King, the God of this Bible. We as Christians, we worship a God who is the absolute governor of this world. Listen to it.

## **Ephesians 1:3-10:**

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."*

I want to stop right there. Here is a God who creates the world, and who chooses before the world is even brought into being. And the second thing about this great, kingly God, is that He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ comes to this earth, He will be the full representation; He will be God in the flesh. The first thing we recognize is that there is a great, kingly God. Now this kingly God has a great plan. He has a great plan for His people. He is going to call a people unto Himself and He has a plan for their lives, and this continues in the middle of that fourth verse. I'll continue at the beginning of that fourth verse.

*4 That we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

Now this great God, this is His plan: He has a people that He is going to choose and bring unto Himself. This people that He's going to call unto Himself, He's got a plan for their lives. The first thing about that plan is they are to be holy. When He speaks about holiness, God's going to set forth the very structure of holiness in the Bible. He sets forth the standard. He decides what is holy and what is not holy, and He reveals it to us. He reveals it in what is called "His statutes," "His laws." Sometimes it's called "His Ways." In the passage here it's called "His will." He has a holy will for these people that He has called unto Himself. And this is His plan for these people: that they're going to be holy before Him; they're going to be blameless. That's His plan for these people, that they would be blameless. And the last thing is that these people would be adopted into His family and they would literally become His children. He adopts these people into His family all for His glory and all for His praise, the praise of this great God and this great King. Now the next thing is, this great King who's got a plan for these people that He has called unto Himself, He has to do something to bring these people unto Himself. It is called *redemption*. Next verse, verse 7:

*7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; 8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; 9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.*

He is going to redeem us. Do you know what it means *to redeem*? Those of you who are involved in financial affairs, when you redeem bonds, you redeem bonds

by purchasing them back. Redemption is always bringing something by paying a price. It was a word that was used for slaves. It was a day of slavery and a slave would be purchased at a redemption price. Why does this great God, who has a great will and plan for His people, have to redeem us? Because we have been separated from Him. That separation comes because of sins. Isaiah said, 'Your sins, your iniquities have separated between you and your God.' That separation is the result of sins and that's why redemption in this passage and forgiveness of sins or forgiveness is linked together. We are redeemed by being forgiven by God, but at a price. "We are purchased at a price," the Bible says. There are many folk who may not understand this estrangement from God but I suggest to you that most of us do. Most of us have known that there were times in our lives before we came to the cross when God was a million miles from us.

## **I. The enormity of the consequences of sin**

Now with that premise, let us make some understanding. We're dealing with the cross. Why is the Apostle Paul so passionate about the cross? Why is it the central theme of the Scripture? Why so much space given to it? Because of these reasons: one, two, three. Number one, when we read this passage of scripture here we understand the enormity, the enormity of the consequences of sin.

One who loved nature, Henry Thoreau, who loved God's creation and likened God's creation unto God, in all probability he would never have called himself this, but he was a pantheist. When he was on his deathbed he had a Christian godly aunt who visited him and implored him to make peace with God. "Have you made your peace with God?" And Thoreau's answer was, "My dear, I did not know that we had so much as quarreled."

Now you can understand and have great insight into Henry Thoreau. He had no knowledge of the fact that God had a problem with him. Would there be anybody here who would come and stand where I stand and suggest to all folk here, "I have never sinned. God has never had a problem with me." If I were to tell you that in the minds of most people who are Christians, in the history of Christianity in the United States, there is one sermon that is regarded as the most powerful sermon ever preached, and the sermon probably that most people would say, 'This is the sermon that has received more interest and more fame than any other one sermon ever preached in the history of the United States.' What do you think that sermon would be? "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" by Jonathan Edwards. To be separated from God because of sin, and the enormous consequence of sin is that it separates you from your God and as a consequence you are in the hands of a God who is offended, in the hands of a God who is bound by His moral nature to deal with sinners.

And somewhere along the way you will hear folks say, 'How could God love

when His own Son died on the cross and He did nothing?' It was because He was to save us by Christ. It was not because He did not love, but it did prove this: God is a hater of sin and when His own Son becomes sin, He dies on the cross—not for His sins but for our sins. There is an enormous consequence of sin. We live in a day and age which tends to make light, like Henry Thoreau didn't even know he had a quarrel.

## **II. The enormous congregation of sinners**

There is a second truth that comes out of this passage, and that is this: there is an enormous congregation of sinners. The Bible says in the book of Romans that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"—not *some*. Would you stand here and say, "I've never sinned"? You wouldn't do that. Our *Catechism* teaches and the Bible teaches that there are two kinds of sins: there are the negative sins, that which I have not done which I should have done...And the opportunities go by day-after-day-after-day for us to do something, and you have heard a number of opportunities right here tonight. 'It is a sin,' says James, 'when a man knows to do something and doesn't do it.' The positive aspect of sin is when we do those things that we know are wrong. To either leave some things undone that should be done, or to do those things which are absolutely wrong. And we know it. There is a great, great congregation of sinners. "All have sinned."

Did you recall the story that Charles Sledge told, when he spoke about the people in Taiwan, beautiful and sweet little children like you saw up here? And the veteran missionary asked, Are they in effect sinners? And if their sin is not forgiven by Christ, what is going to happen to them? ...beautiful little children. "All have sinned." Charles Sledge said that he understood that in his mind, but till he went out as a missionary to Taiwan he was a practicing Universalist. He just believed somehow in his head, but he never had that passion that the Apostle Paul had that led to missions, that the people of this world and the people who are your neighbors, if they have sinned, there is an enormous consequence. We are separated from a holy God. There may be someone here on this night who is thinking of some heinous sin that he has committed and wondering. There would be many of us here who would say, 'I have never been to jail or this or that.' But when you understand the consequences of Christ, when He speaks about sin in the Sermon on the Mount, to even say, "I hate you" is likened unto murder, there is an enormous consequence of sin. It separates from God forever. There is an enormous congregation of sinners. The whole world, everybody you meet. "All have sinned."

## **III. The enormous cost to redeem sinners**

There is an enormous cost to redeem sinners, an enormous cost. Our text tells

us that we are redeemed from the consequences of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ. Now when you speak of the blood of Jesus Christ, we are speaking of that which is a rather distasteful subject. There are folk who are led into medicine who for the first time as interns watch an operation and choose not to practice medicine. The blood of Jesus Christ is associated with the cross of Jesus Christ, and the cross is just as distasteful as the word the *blood* of Jesus Christ. The cross was an instrument of torture, the most inhumane thing that had ever been invented by man.

The price of redemption is at an enormous cost. That enormous cost is the life of God Himself on Calvary's cross. That's why the cross is central. If there is any other way for a sinner to come to a holy God, then let us preach it. It is not even mentioned in any other religion. It is not even mentioned in anybody else's. The only time that people talk about sin is in terms of how it may be corrected by your own self-efforts. The Apostle Paul therefore screams out in passion, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ." Because it was by that enormous price that he who was a murderer of Christians and was associated with sinners was redeemed and brought into the family of God. And his murder was washed away in the blood of the Lamb, and he was made a child of God, and he entered into a state of holiness. And so it is with you, and so it is with me. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin." That's God's way.

Now I want to close with two stories. We are dealing here with the passion of the cross, the centrality of the cross—tonight only "pardoned by the cross." We are going to be dealing with peace by the cross, purity by the cross, the possibilities by the cross, the promises of the cross, but just one here tonight, pardoned by the cross. A pardon is a payment for penalty—all of our sins.

Now here's where the passion comes in. When I was in seminary there was a Methodist minister, a bishop; his name was Bishop Moore. He would come to our Presbyterian seminary once a year and preach. And I can remember some of that man, and I remember his passion and I remember this story that he told. I admired the man. He was a great, old-time Methodist. As a child, his family had a vacation home up in the mountains at the side of a lake. And one day when he was swimming by himself, as about a ten-year-old boy, he had a cramp and he found himself in deep trouble. And a man who was passing by, walking along the edge of the lake, ran out onto the pier, jumped in the water and saved this little boy and brought him up on the pier. And when he saw that he was all right, the little boy (Bishop Moore to be) said, "I told that man, 'Thank you for saving my life.'" And the man who never identified himself. He never saw that man again. And the ten-year-old boy said, "Thank you for saving my life." And the man said, "Son, may your life be worth saving." Our Savior saved us. It's not the best of theology if you work it all the way through, but I tell you anyway. He didn't save us so that we would just go on into unholy living. The passion of the cross is that we better, we better be made worthy of salvation. And that's going to come in some other sermons.

Here's the second story, apparently another true story. I heard this from an English preacher about some event that happened in England years ago. A famous military officer who had the honor of the nation, he had a brother who was tried for murder, convicted and was sentenced to death. And his military brother pleaded with the British government for his life and in an unheard of act, because of what he'd done for the nation, he was given a pardon for his brother. He went into his brother, never mentioned the pardon but said to him, "Brother, if you were to be set free, what would you do?" And the brother with glint in his eye said, "I would kill that judge and kill the man who witnessed against me." And the officer left and tore up the pardon. We're not pardoned to go on in our ways; we are pardoned at an enormous cost. And we praise God for that, glory in what God has done for us, are amazed at what He's done for us on the cross: that He has forgiven all our sin and adopted us into His family through the cross of Jesus, but not that we would kill judges if we were set free and those who witnessed against us. As we pray together.

*Our God and heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the fact that there is passion in others' religion and even as they worship pagan gods they sometimes cause us to take note of ourselves, that we come to Thee not as those who are in an existential passion of worship, but we come to Thee as those who know the meaning of the cross, who understand. And it is because of our understanding that we sing praises, that we glory in the cross of Christ, that we say too with the Apostle Paul, that there would be no hope for me if it were not for the cross of Christ. Now therefore glory in that cross, and all of the things pale into insignificance. We thank Thee, Lord Jesus. Now we would be worthy and live for Thee and pray as you taught us to pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

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