

The Reason for Easter

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everybody. It's a great pleasure again to be with you today. Thank you for the warm welcome from John. John mentioned that he was glad that I brought Beulah with me today, but I must correct that and say that at my age, it's Beulah who brings me.

Now, John read from John chapter 8 this morning, and I just want to repeat the verse from John chapter 8 and verse 12. John chapter 8 and verse 12. This is what Jesus said. When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Now, you who come to a church where the gospel is preached every Sunday and you have activities during the week where you are enabled to grow in the Christian faith and to understand more and more of the Christian faith, will never understand fully what it means to have no gospel, no tract, no portion of scripture, no fellowship, no church, nothing of that sort to guide you at all.

But that was the situation into which the Lord Jesus Christ came when he came into the world. True enough, the Jewish people had the Old Testament, which was, in fact, a light to their feet and a lamp to their path.

But nevertheless, they never had the true light that came from heaven. There are many thousands and thousands of people today who live in darkness, who have no light whatsoever.

[1 : 3 3] And when we open the Bible, we have the full light shining to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the light of life. He helps us to understand life. He helps us to negotiate life.

And he gives us that light on our pathway that leads us to life eternal. And so the Lord Jesus Christ is the center of all we do in this church. It's the center of all we say and all we speak, no matter what subject we're dealing with.

It all finally lands up at the cross at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and then risen and ascended to glory. Now, it's about that that I want to speak about today.

It's about the purpose of the cross. And that is what I want to talk to you about this morning for a short while. Because I want to remind you that the death of Jesus Christ was the most unique event that ever occurred in the history of the world.

There was not anything that in any way compares with the uniqueness and the enormity. Not enormity, because enormity means wickedness.

[2 : 3 6] But the enormity of what went on on the cross when the Lord Jesus Christ went to die on the cross for us. There is nothing greater in all of the history of the world than that.

Because what he was doing at that time on the cross was fixing a total broken universe. He wasn't just fixing broken people, but he was fixing a whole broken universe.

The Lord Jesus Christ was taking upon himself all of the sin, all of the iniquity, all of the guilt, all of the brokenness that sin entailed. Not only upon the human race and not only upon the world, but upon the whole of God's created order.

He was taking it all upon himself and made himself responsible and guilty for it and offered himself up as a sacrifice to the Father and as an atonement for our sins.

Nothing greater in all the world than the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. But now, let me just for this morning's purposes mention three very important things that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

[3 : 44] The purpose of the cross cannot be summarized in one sentence. The purpose of the cross cannot be summarized in one paragraph. We can say Jesus died for our sins.

That would be true. We can say that Jesus died so that we may be forgiven. That is all true. But that's not the full truth. There's a lot more to the cross than what we normally attribute to it.

So I'll mention three things to you this morning that I think are important for us to remember as we think about why Jesus went to the cross and what happened on the cross and what he accomplished there for us.

And the first is the obvious one, which we're all familiar with, and that is that he went to the cross to die so that we might be spiritually redeemed. He died for our redemption.

He died so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God and made right with God again. Now let me pause there for a moment and say you will hear those words spoken many times in this church and from this pulpit and in one way or another through the things you read or the things you hear.

[4 : 49] But I don't know if you or I understand the importance of the privilege of those words in a world of darkness. You have seen for yourself, and if you haven't seen for yourself, then you ought to educate yourself by checking out on the internet and reading the books and reading the magazines and reading the newspapers to see how people seek for forgiveness today.

Just a few weeks ago, the largest gathering in the history of mankind took place on the banks of the Ganges River.

Remember, when about 120 million people gathered, to do what? They gathered so that they could bathe in the waters for forgiveness of sins. There is a tremendous searching in the world today for the forgiveness of sins.

The one half of the world seeks forgiveness of sins through various rituals and various religions and various religious beliefs. They look for some ways to appease the ancestors, some ways to appease the great spirit, some ways to appease the God of the universe.

They look for some way to get their sins forgiven so they can start afresh. Other people in the other half of the world, they do not seek forgiveness in that way. They seek forgiveness through their good deeds.

[6 : 09] They seek forgiveness by joining non-government organizations, by giving a year of their life to go and build houses for poor people or something of that nature. These are all very laudable things and should not be stopped.

But very often people use all of these things to build up within themselves a kind of a credit balance of being good and feeling good about themselves. So that if you were to ask them, are you going to go to heaven?

They will say yes. And if you were to ask them if they were good people, they would say yes. Because they have compiled their abundance of goodness to the things that they have done.

Not realizing that there's nothing that any human being can ever do no matter how much they do. Even if they gave their body to the flames, says the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.

Could they ever achieve to go to heaven? Because nobody, nobody can meet or match the goodness and the righteousness that God requires from us before we enter into his glory.

[7 : 11] You know, when God put Adam and Eve on the earth, he gave them a righteousness. He gave them a rightness. They were right with the universe. They were in sync with everything around them.

They were in sync with God. They were in sync with each other. There was a rightness about them and a righteousness about them when they were in the Garden of Eden. But you know, dear friends, when sin entered into the world, that right turned into sin.

That righteousness was abandoned. And one day when we, and of course because we are their children, we inherit their unrighteousness. And one day when we get to heaven one day, you know what God is going to ask us?

He's not going to say to you, why did you speak to your wife like that? Or why did you abandon your family? Or why did you do this? Or why did you engage in that activity? Or why did you get addicted to gambling or drugs or whatever the thing is?

Those are all peripheral things. The most important question God is going to ask us is this. What did you do with the righteousness I gave you in the Garden of Eden?

[8 : 16] I want that righteousness back. Before you can get into heaven, that's the righteousness I want back. And that is exactly the righteousness that Jesus gives us when we put our faith and trust in him.

He takes all of our sin and takes it to the cross and pays the price for our disobedience. And the righteousness that he has is the righteousness that God demands from us before we can get into heaven.

And God in his infinite grace and mercy gives that righteousness to us. What an amazing thing that is. And so we have a tremendous, tremendous transaction that takes place.

And so the death of Jesus Christ is a tremendously important thing. Because in the first place, it is the great event in the history of the world that provides us with a spiritual redemption.

And I mention that to you in the face of the tremendous search in the world today for some way to be right with whoever it is out there who is holding us hostage.

[9 : 22] God, that's the way many people feel. There's somebody holding us hostage out there. My conscience is not clear. There's something that is not right with me. And I can't get it right.

You know, many years ago, there was a James Bond movie called This World is Not Enough. Do you remember that? That's exactly a description of the way many people feel today.

It doesn't matter what they achieve, what they own. It doesn't matter what they can buy with their money or what they can't buy with their money. At the end of the day, this world is not enough. And I read many years ago that there would be far fewer people visiting psychologists and psychiatrists if only they could find forgiveness of their sins.

If only they could do that. I myself remember many years ago when I was a young minister having to visit an older person, very much older than me, a lady who was in her 80s when I was just a young minister in my 30s.

I had to go and visit her. And she was dying of cancer. And she sat propped up in a chair. And she was almost, almost not comatose.

[10 : 29] And as I sat next to her or in front of her in the chair with a family member nearby, she said one word over and over and over again to me.

She said this, will he forgive me? Will he forgive me? And I would explain the gospel to her. Then she would say, yes, but will he forgive me? Yes, will he forgive me?

And I could not get through to her the gospel of the grace of God because there was something in her earlier life that she had done which had lived with her through all the years.

And it covered over with parties and dances and all sorts of things. That little voice of conscience had been smothered. But you know, the apostle Paul wrote that some people's sins follow them.

And so eventually it caught up with her. And in that moment of terrible weakness when she stood before the doors of eternity, she was asking this great eternal question, will he forgive me?

[11 : 25] The answer is, of course he will forgive you if you will turn to him through his son, Jesus Christ. But if you do not do that, there is no forgiveness at all. And so we rejoice in the words that the apostle Paul wrote in Romans chapter 5 and verse 8.

And it's this, God shows his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. We didn't deserve Jesus to come and die for us.

We were still rebels against him. Nobody wanted Jesus in the world. Nobody wanted him or cared about him. The authorities of the day didn't care about him. They wanted him dead.

And so the unwanted Jesus goes to the cross. And there he sheds his blood on the cross for us. And the world that passes by and shakes their head. And the gospel says some people beat their breasts and said, oh, if he only came down from the cross, then we would believe in him.

They did not realize that the one who was broken and beaten and bleeding and hanging on that cross for us was the very son of God. And the message he was proclaiming to the world through his outstretched arms is that God loves you.

[12 : 34] God loves you. God loves you. And he wants you back in fellowship with himself. And so the great first thing I want to mention to you today, there's a lot more that could be said, but I want to say this to you, that Jesus went to the cross.

And the great primary purpose was so that you could be forgiven. I could be forgiven. My sins could be wiped away. We could be reconnected with God again.

We could be reconciled to him, become his children, and live in the light of his glory and grace until the day that he takes us home. Not to say that we will be without difficulties or problems or doubts or fears from time to time, but that ultimately his great unseen eternal hand will keep us in his grasp and see us through our last moments until we are safely in his presence forever.

And so here is the love of God to rebels. Here is the ransom for sins that has been paid. Here is the salvation that Jesus said he came to bring.

Here is the life that he said that leads to the abundant life that leads to eternal life that Jesus himself promised in John chapter 10. And it's all bound up in what he did on the cross for us.

[13 : 50] So the first reason why Jesus died, the first purpose that I want to mention to you for the cross is that it brings to us spiritual redemption. But the second thing I want to mention is this, that the cross not only answers the conundrum, the question that people ask, how can I have my sins forgiven?

But the cross also answers the question that many people are asking today, and that is how can we live together? How can we be a people who live together?

How can we be harmonized? How can we be unified as a people who live together? And I want to say to you today that the cross is the answer of God to a broken and a fractured humanity that has learned to hate each other and not love each other.

And the fracturing of humanity you can see for yourselves on your TV sets and on your news media and in your magazines. Just last night I read on BBC News of the gathering of forces again between Israel and Jordan and the tremendous hatred that exists between those two nations.

But not only those nations. It's all of the other nations of the world who fight each other and kill each other and people who harm each other and who hurt each other and don't get on with each other.

[15 : 11] And we can see that even in our own homes. We can see on the one hand the world doesn't get on with each other on the international scene, but we don't even get on with each other across the breakfast table.

We can see the disharmony. We can see the fracturedness. We can see the brokenness of our relationships in every day that we live. And some of you may well have been the victim of some broken relationship, some betrayal, and you may be scarred because of something that may have happened to you in your life during the course of your years.

But what did the Lord Jesus Christ come to do? Well, one of the things that he came to do was to create a new humanity where all of those divisions would not exist.

And so the Apostle Paul puts it this way. The Lord Jesus Christ came not only to give us spiritual redemption, but he also came to solve a mystery.

And the mystery is how can people live together? And here is what the Apostle Paul says. This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

[16 : 27] Now, in Paul's day, the world was divided into two peoples as far as Jewish people were concerned. On the one side there were the Jews who worshipped the true God. On the other side was the rest of the world, whoever they were.

The millions of people who made up all the nations of the world, they were all Gentiles. And never the twain shall meet. No Gentile could go to the temple. No Gentile could take part in any of the Jewish rituals.

Gentiles were omitted. And so there was this tremendous division that existed in Paul's day, which is an illustration of the divisions that exist in the world today.

But when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, what do you think he was saying? He was saying, not only are the Jews who believe in me to be saved, but the Gentiles who believe in me can be saved too.

And the people from the furthest corners of the earth can come to me and be saved. I will turn no one away. You may have been turned away at the door of the temple.

[17 : 30] You may be turned away even today by some church. You may be turned away by this or that organization. But I can guarantee to you today, dear friends, that one of you, not one of your friends, will ever be turned away from the Lord Jesus Christ, who holds out his nail-pierced hands to accept every one of us who turns to him in faith.

And when you do come to him, you are not only forgiven and reconciled to God, but you are made part of a very large family with tremendous diversities in that family.

Now, today we talk a lot about the various sexes and the various expressions of sexuality. So there's a lot of debate today about transgenderism and about homosexuality and about racism and about all of these things that are quite new to our society and have caused new polarizations in our society.

I want to say this to you today as I say to myself. It doesn't matter who the person may be. It doesn't matter what their ethnicity may be. Other people may turn you away because of your ethnicity, but the Lord Jesus will never do that.

Other people may turn you away because of your sexuality, but the Lord Jesus will never do that. Other people may turn you away because of some other reason, because of your class maybe, or because of this reason or that reason, but you will never be turned away by the Lord Jesus Christ.

[19 : 05] When he died on the cross, his great arms outstretched and nailed to the cross were symbolic of the welcome that he gives to the whole world to turn to him and to come to him and be saved.

And when they are, they're made part of a massive, gigantic human family that is unified together by a common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the only way to bring harmony to our world today. So you may have various nations of the world at war with each other, but if you were able to travel to those nations and meet up with Christians, you would immediately be accepted.

Even though you spoke a different language, even though you dress differently, even though your traditions may be different. When you meet someone who believes in the Lord Jesus, there's a smile and a welcome, and there's an acceptance immediately.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to forgive our sins, also died to bring together a broken world and to bring together people who formerly were disunited and lived in hatred of each other.

[20 : 13] Here's the great mystery. The world meets in all of its various meetings, its commonwealth meetings. It meets in the United Nations. It meets all over to try to solve the problems of disunity and war and injustices.

Do you think they will ever succeed? They will never succeed. Never. Because of human nature. Never succeed. Because human nature is so programmed so that we live always at variance with each other.

We'll always disagree with each other. There will always be a brokenness in our world. But when the great Lord Jesus, who died on the cross for us, draws his people together, one day you will see that there are people from the north and people from the south and people from the east and people from the west and people who dress differently to you and people who decorate themselves differently to you and people whose traditions are different to you and people who eat different foods to you and people who have different lifestyles to you, but who have all been forgiven by the blood shed by Jesus and the great atonement he made.

And there's one human family before the face of God. That there is the great answer to the mystery of our fractured and divided society today is for Christ to be made Lord and Savior.

We know that won't happen all over the world today. We know that that remains for a day yet to come. But nevertheless, that is the solution to the mystery of how to bring people together.

[21 : 43] You will never be rejected and I will never be rejected if I come to Jesus as a sinner and say, Lord, I offer myself to you. Please cleanse me, forgive me, and accept me.

And the Lord Jesus Christ, because of his death on the cross, he does exactly that. He accepts us and binds us together. Then the third thing I want to say is this, that the purpose the Lord Jesus Christ came to die on the cross was not only to give us a spiritual redemption here and now and to solve the mystery of how people can live together, but also to give us a great hope for the future.

There is no hope, my dear friends. Do you know that the whole world is filled with hopelessness? Do you know where you can see that? You can see that in your superhero movies. That's where you can see it.

Because in your superhero movies, the world is always in danger. Have you noticed that? There's got to be a hero or group of heroes who's going to solve the problems of the world.

They are the ones who are going to actually rescue the world. Why? Because built into the psyche of the human race is an instinct that the world is in danger, and of course it is.

[22 : 58] There's the judgment of God that is awaiting us. There's the judgment that's going to come when all who have ever lived will stand before the Almighty to give an account for the things they've done in the flesh.

And then God will create a new world, and there will be a new heaven, and all of us who put our faith and trust in Jesus, we will live before him under new conditions, and there will be no tears in our eyes after that.

But you can see in your world today the hopelessness that pervades society today. That is why you've got these extremist groups. That's why you've got people on the left and the right who exercise the extremes of what they believe.

They harm people. They hurt people. They insult people. All of our politics throughout the world today are the politics of insults. Have you noticed that? We don't declare the policies.

We declare our hatred of the opposition. And so we get to despise the politicians because we recognize the hypocrisy in it all. We recognize that these are not people we can respect.

[24 : 02] They have got no respect for other people themselves. All around the world it's the same problem, dear friends. And so there is no hope in the world today. And because many people feel that there is no hope in the world today, and they feel that there should be hope, but there is no hope in the world today, that is why they seek out often medical help, or they join these weird cults and sects, all looking for something that they can't articulate or explain.

But the Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross, he came to give us a hope for the future. That's what he did. And that is why the Apostle Peter writes these words.

He says about the Lord Jesus Christ, he says, Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart, for you've been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

Do you know that, my dear friend, as you sit in this seat today, that you are imperishable? You know, immortality belongs only to God, but God has given to human beings an immortality.

Nobody who dies goes nowhere. Everybody who dies goes somewhere. But those who put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ go to be with him, and they are awaiting that great, great moment when he will return again and the inheritance that they have in him, the hope that they have in him will be established forever on the earth and they will live forever and forever under his rule.

[25 : 53] So why did the Lord Jesus Christ come? Well, it could be said in many ways. There's a lot more that one could say. But at least these three things are important. He came so that we might have spiritual redemption.

He came so that the mystery of how human beings could live together could be solved. He came to offer us hope, not only for this life, for the next. And a message like that, dear friends, cannot be heard without demanding a response from the error.

I have to make a response to it every time I preach this message. I have to say to myself, Frank Ratiff, do you still believe it? Is it still true to you? Is it still part of your own heart?

I'm glad to be able to say it is. I believe it with all my heart. And I mention these things to you as something that I believe. If you do not know the Lord Jesus, you will be lost.

If you embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved. Saved in the sense that you will never face the judgment again. And you will be part of the great new world that God will create.

[27 : 02] When the great mystery will be seen to be in action, people from all the nations of the world gathered into God's new world to live together under his rule in love and harmony forever.

But the great thing is, have you accepted this and believe this with all your heart? And you know, there are two responses that are mentioned in the Bible that are very important for us to remember.

When the Apostle Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and people shouted out, what shall we do? Peter said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

But repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Now, I don't know if you've done that. You may feel that you have done that. And that's wonderful. But it may well be that somebody here has not actually taken that step yet.

And so, in Hebrews, in Hebrews chapter 2 and in verse 3, we have these words. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

[28 : 06] Do you know, I have met many people in my life, in my ministry. And there are many of them who would talk to me and would never, ever dream of rejecting what I've been saying or rejecting the gospel.

But when I would ask them if they would turn their lives over to Jesus, they will say, I'm not ready. I'm not ready. You know what that is? That is neglecting your salvation.

That is pushing it apart. Pushing it away from you. Pushing off that great moment of decision. And so, either we repent and are forgiven or we can neglect our salvation.

And push it away and say, I don't feel ready for it yet. I've got my life to live. I don't want salvation. Like salvation is going to spoil your life. I don't want salvation yet.

And so, you put it apart. My friends, I hope that is not you today. The Lord Jesus Christ came to the cross to die. He came to tell you he loves you. He wants you.

[29 : 10] He wants to turn your life around. He wants to give you a light for your path. He wants to give you a lamp so that you can see which way you are walking. He says he is the light of the world.

And he wants you to have that light. Who would not want it? Why would you not want it? Why would no one want it? That's the most amazing thing. But you can't have it until you cross the line and you embrace Christ as Savior.

You've got to cross that line. You know, I'll close with this. The great Billy Graham, who died recently, told this story. He said there was a very great baseball game in America.

And it was the end of the season. And it was the championship game. And the champions were defending their title. And the game was a very tense game and a very close game.

And in the last innings, the last batsman got up. And all they needed was a home run. And they would win the game. Now, if you know baseball, you'll know that the batter hits the ball.

[30 : 16] Then he's got to run around to base number one, base number two, base number three, and then back home again, shaped in a diamond. And so this batter stood and it began to drizzle.

And the pitcher pitched the ball. And the batter hit that ball right out of the park. And he ran to base number one. And he ran to base number two.

And he ran to base number three. And he ran to base number four. And the crowd got up. And they absolutely exalted in this great victory and roared their approval, like you see in our cricket games and rugby games today.

But above the crowd, into the microphone, came the whistle of the referee. He blew his whistle and he pointed to the batsman and he said, Out! Nobody could believe it.

The crowd, absolutely shocked, to deathly silence, sat down. And the batsman said, Out! And when the umpires came to ask him why he was out, the umpires said, He never touched third base.

[31 : 26] He ran past third base without touching it. My friends, there are many people who go through life without, metaphorically speaking, touching the cross, touching Jesus.

You may think you're in the game. And you may think that all is well. But at the end of the day, when you face him, you haven't actually touched him in that saving way, receiving him as your savior.

And the whistle will blow. And you'll be out. That's a sad thing, isn't it? But for this morning, the arms are outstretched. And Jesus says, I don't want you out.

I want you in. Please. Come in today. Now let's pray. So Heavenly Father, we come to you at the end of this morning service.

We thank you for the great, great thing that Jesus did for us on the cross. How wonderful. How amazing. How beyond comprehension.

[32 : 27] I pray, Lord, that for all who are present here today, I know that many of them will already have taken that step and put their faith and trust in Jesus. And they would have touched third base.

But there are many others who have not done so. And I pray that by your grace they may do so today. And not just in a silent, quiet sort of a way, but in a definite way.

In a way which is open and honest and fulsome. A way where they will stand up for the Lord Jesus and say, You are my Savior and I will live for you.

Oh Lord, I pray that many people will come to you outstretched arms and say, Lord Jesus, please make me part of your great future family in Jesus' name. Amen.