



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“Why Did Jesus Have to Die?”

Scripture Lessons: *Genesis 18:20-33; Hebrews 9:23-28*

*This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling Jr.  
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## Genesis 18:20-33

### Judgment Pronounced on Sodom

<sup>20</sup>Then the Lord said, “How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! <sup>21</sup>I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know.”

<sup>22</sup>So, the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. <sup>23</sup>Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup>Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” <sup>26</sup>And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.”

<sup>27</sup>Abraham answered, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup>Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” <sup>29</sup>Again, he spoke to him, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” <sup>30</sup>Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” <sup>31</sup>He said, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” <sup>32</sup>Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” <sup>33</sup>And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

## Hebrews 9:23-28

### Christ’s Sacrifice Takes Away Sin

<sup>23</sup>Thus, it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup>For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. <sup>25</sup>Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; <sup>26</sup>for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at

the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup>And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, <sup>28</sup>so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

## **Why Did Jesus Have to Die?**

Yas I look out among the congregation this morning, I can't help but notice that there are a few less people here today than there were last Sunday; and so, for being her, I'm going to give us a little bit of credit ... whether or not credit is due.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's Letter to the Hebrews – and let me add that, while I realize scholars are not in agreement as to who actually wrote the Letter to the Hebrews, I'm siding with the historical consensus that Paul wrote it, which existed up through the 17<sup>th</sup> century – in chapter 5, the author says this ...

“Everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.”

I'm going to assume that having come to worship on what is widely known as a “low Sunday,” that we have here among us individuals who have moved beyond milk, and who ponder deeply what it means to be faithful followers of Jesus.

I'm going to assume that everyone here – or at home or wherever you are worshipping – desires, and, in fact, needs solid food when it comes to a most particular and foundational question for which all Christians must have an answer: “Why did Jesus have to die?”

We talked about Jesus' death and resurrection at some length last Sunday, but why did it have to happen in the way it did? I mean, couldn't God have just forgiven us and avoided the agony of the cross? In other words, what is it about the nature of God and the nature of fallen humanity that required the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die as he did?

Well, before we begin to address the question of why, we would perhaps be well served to first ask the question of what. Namely, “What is accomplished for Jesus having atoned for the sins of His people on the cross?”

I love how pastor and theologian Alistair Begg talks about God's riches at Christ's expense! He imagines the thief on the cross – someone who had been deriding Jesus along with some other fellow criminal. A man who never came to church on the Sunday after Easter ... never attended a Bible study ... didn't tithe ... probably couldn't tell us even one of Jesus' parables ... and yet he made it!

Begg playfully imagines the thief on the cross meeting the receiving angel at the pearly gates. “What are you doing here?” “I don’t know.” “What do you mean you don’t know?” “I mean, I don’t know.”

The angel goes and gets his supervisor. “Sir, we have just a few questions for you: Are you clear on the doctrine of justification by faith?” And the guy says, “I’ve never heard of that in my life.” “Well, let’s just go to the doctrine of Scripture.” And the guy’s like (hand gesture to signify), “I don’t know.”

The supervisor looks at him, and finally, in frustration, he says, “On what basis are you here?” and he says, “The man on the middle cross said I can come!”

It is very important that we remain utterly and completely grounded in one of the fundamental principles about God’s work of salvation on the cross ... and it is this: The work itself was none other than Jesus’ work to do! Not ours. And we can’t take any credit nor can anything we do bring about those eternal benefits that Jesus achieved!

Isaac Watts’ hymn states it beautifully: “Forbid it Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God: all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.”

Friends, true communion with God is what Jesus achieves for us on the cross, and yet, here again the question persists: “Why did Jesus have to die?”

Well, to begin to answer that question we first need to understand that this was Jesus’ destiny from before he was born, which is to say that Jesus’ life and death and resurrection were not new developments within God’s story of salvation.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the prophet Isaiah talks about Jesus as a suffering servant. And in chapter 53 he declares, “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.”

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray! We have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

There is a moving portrait by William Holman Hunt entitled “The Shadow of Death.” It is a very detailed painting with lots of symbolism, but what usually strikes the observer most is seeing Jesus as a young man in a carpenter’s shop stretching out his arms, as if awakening to a new day, which creates a shadow on the back wall of the shop, which, when combined with a shelf and hanging tools, produces

the unmistakable image of a crucifixion.

This was Hunt's way of expressing the destiny of Jesus from the beginning. That was his way of saying that the death of Jesus was always a part of the story.

If we want to understand the story, then we need to understand the author, and in this morning's Old Testament lesson we are given a wonderful glimpse into the character/nature of God.

Sodom and Gomorrah are the quintessential sin cities of the Old Testament, and Abraham goes to God and asks, quite frankly, a foolish question: "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"

Well, of course not! Abraham answers his own question: "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

That's the key ... God does what is just. It would not be just to kill everyone if there were 50 faithful souls, or 45, or 40, or 20, or even 10 ... and this was not Abraham negotiating with God, mind you. God's character is wonderfully consistent in his justice and in his willingness to forgive.

Ah, but grimly asking the wicked if it is God's nature to be holy and righteous – and just – then there must be justice and there certainly was for Sodom and Gomorrah!

You see, justice is built into God's character, which is to say that there are laws, eternal decrees, moral debts that we owe ... and if God is who he says he is, then that debt must be accounted for ... atoned for.

The oft referenced imagery – for comparison's sake between financial debts and moral debts – is the child who goes into a candy store.

In the first illustration the child has \$2, but when he goes to the register he realizes that \$2 isn't enough. Of course, if we were there we would probably reach into our pockets and cover the difference ... and everyone would be on their way.

That's a monetary debt ... but that's not ours. That's not what Jesus was talking about when he taught us to pray, saying, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

The more apt illustration for us is the child who goes into the candy store with no intention of paying for the candy. Instead, we grab it and we run ... and when we're caught and brought back into the store ... it is no longer a matter of someone covering an expense. We have done wrong. We have

broken the law. And justice is what we deserve!

As I prepare to read from the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, I want us to notice how it talks about Jesus not as an earthly High Priest, not as someone who goes in and out of a tabernacle that can be set up and taken down, but as a heavenly High Priest, one whose temple is transcendent and who makes a sacrifice once and for all!

To be clear, sacrifices have proven to be God's determinative way of working out justice. How He removes sin and its consequences, which we know are death.

Also, pay attention to how it is recognized that Jesus has appeared, now appears, and will appear again. There really is an ongoing and eternal aspect of who Jesus was, and is, and what he will forever do.

And listen for what we are told that Jesus will do. The divine intercession that he will make for us. But Jesus doesn't die again. That's why we don't call this table an altar ... there are no more sacrifices to be made!

No! When God looks upon his beloved Son, our Savior, and when he beholds the scars, the wounds about which we talked this morning, that is the intercession. That is that satisfaction of the justice that is due.

Beginning with verse 23 we read: "Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these.

"For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

"Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the High Priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world.

"But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgement, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."

Though we eagerly await his coming we often do not so eagerly accept the doctrine of atonement/that on the cross Jesus was offering atonement/reconciliation/satisfaction ... that he was paying the penalty for our sinfulness so that we could have a blessed relationship with God!

Our children's hymn this morning was a verse from the hymn "In Christ Alone." When our new Glory to God hymnal was first produced – and we haven't moved to that hymnal for a variety of reasons – the hymnbook committee grappled with one another about including "In Christ Alone" primarily because of verse number 2. It reads:

In Christ alone who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe.  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save,  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied,  
For every sin on Him was laid.  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

The editors of the new hymnal asked the original authors if they would consider making a change ... instead of reading "the wrath of God was satisfied" it would read "the love of God was magnified."

As it happened, the authors objected to the change, and the hymn was not included.

And I get it, to a point ... yes, the love of God was undoubtedly magnified, and, yes, the use of the word wrath in that context may make it sound like God was angry at Jesus; but, make no mistake about it, sin does make God angry! More to the point, it breaks God's heart!

In this world where people are prone to avert their eyes from sin ... as if to suggest that God averts His eyes as well ... they are sorely mistaken, because sin is serious business! So serious, in fact, that God sacrificed his own Son so that we might be finally and fully unburdened by sin's consequences!

Oh, to not deal with sin would be for God to compromise His character ... and God will not do that!

Praise be to God, that our great High Priest, Jesus Christ our Lord, has reconciled us to God by condemning sin in his own flesh and blood ... that he has become as the Bible tells us, "The atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (cf. John 2:2)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\*The above sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.