



The Apostles' Creed (Part 5) – Suffered Under Pontius Pilate; Was Crucified, Dead, and Buried

Matt Chandler – September 20, 2015

[Video]

Male: I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...

Female: And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...

Male: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...

Male: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

Male: He descended to hell.

Female: The third day he rose again from the dead.

Male: He ascended to heaven...

Female: And sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty...

Female: From whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Male: I believe in the Holy Spirit...

Female: The holy catholic church...

Male: The communion of saints...

Male: The forgiveness of sins...

Male: The resurrection of the body...

Male: And the life everlasting.

Male: Amen.

[End of video]

If you have your Bibles, will you go ahead and grab those? If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you, under your seat, behind you. Why don't you grab that? If you don't own one, that's our gift to you. If you grab that Bible, let's go to John, chapter 18. We're going to read quite a bit of text together today as a family of faith.

The death of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind stands as one of the most perplexing and beautiful events in the history of humankind. I say "perplexing" because maybe you're a bit like me, where you grew up kind of hearing about the death of Jesus but couldn't quite reconcile what the death of a Jew 2,000 years ago has to do with you, has to do with your life.

You see it much more like George Washington and the cherry tree, "I can't tell a lie" kind of thing, and are just a bit confused about what the death of a Jew in 2,000-years-ago Palestine has to do with you. You just don't understand. That's what I mean by perplexing. But it also is easily the most beautiful thing in human history, and it's beautiful in that what we see happening in the death of Jesus Christ is God reconciling us to God and creating a people, the covenant community of faith, that is both universal and local.

We're going to dive back into the Apostles' Creed. This is the fifth week of our series through the creed. We've stood and read the creed together these last five weeks. We're going to continue to do that today. I just want to remind you, as always, that what happens when we stand and read the creed together publicly, out loud, where we can see each other saying these things, is first, we're tying ourselves into thousands of years of history. We're saying, "We believe what Christians have believed for a long, long, long time."

Simultaneously, we are rejecting popular narratives and showing where our allegiance lies. We're rejecting the popular isms of our day and instead are saying, "This is what *I* believe. This is where *I*

stand." Each week so far in the series I've tried to introduce new isms we would reject as Christians. Today when we stand and recite the Apostles' Creed together, we're rejecting intellectualism. We're not rejecting the intellect, because the Bible has said we are to be a thinking people.

We are to love the Lord our God with all our minds. We're not a herd of morons. We are to have great intellect, but we reject intellectualism, the idea that man in his mind can solve what's wrong with man, that if we could just think the right things we would be able to fix everything that's broken. We categorically reject that. We say it's not true, and we have thousands and thousands and thousands of years of history to prove it's not true, because the smartest human beings alive have not been able to fix the mess we're in.

We would also reject legalism. In saying the creed, we reject not only intellectualism, not only materialism, not only nationalism, not only individualism, but we also would categorically reject legalism. We would reject the notion that there's a list of behaviors you must do to right yourself before God, and if you just checked the right boxes off the checklist of more behavior modification that somehow you would tilt the scales in your favor.

We categorically reject that as Christians, and we say, "No, no, no. We believe in the triune God of the Bible." With that said, would you stand with me as we read the Apostles' Creed together? If you're not a Christian or simply don't want to stand, that's fine also, but we're going to read this together as a family.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting, amen."

The phrase we're on in our time together today is "Suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried." Now the phrase in the creed deals with the facts of the death of Jesus. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. This cannot be argued historically. This historically occurred. This is a fact around the death of Jesus Christ. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. The means by which he was

killed is crucifixion. He physically died. He didn't swoon; he died, and he was buried in a rich man's tomb. All of that can easily, outside of Christian sources, be shown to be historically accurate.

So those are the facts, but I don't want to spend our time simply on the facts. I want to spend our time *under* the facts talking about the truth of what's occurring in the death of Jesus Christ; namely, that the death of Christ reconciles us to God and creates a covenant community of faith that is both universal and local. With that said, let's look at John 18, starting in verse 28. At this point, Jesus has already been arrested. He has already been severely beaten twice. We pick it up in verse 28.

"Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas [the high priest] to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. So Pilate went outside to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered him, 'If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.'

Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.' The Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.' This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

Jesus answered, 'Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews.'"

If you have a background in church, if you know this story, they actually started. Peter pulled his sword and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. Jesus told him, "Put away the sword" and put the dude's ear back on. So this started, and Jesus killed it in a way of saying, "Peter, no one is taking me, bro. I'm going." It's not going to read like that in your Bible, but that's what happened.

"Then Pilate said to him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to

the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asks an existential question that still floats in the air today.

"Pilate said to him, 'What is truth?' After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, 'I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?' They cried out again, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a robber." We find out in another gospel he was a robber and also a murderer. "Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him." That is, ripped the skin off his back.

"And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Behold the man!'

When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, 'Crucify him, crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.' When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer.

So Pilate said to him, 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have not authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.' From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.'

So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall

I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' So he delivered him over to them to be crucified."

If we had time to go to the rest of the Gospels... The Gospels are different perspectives on the same event. What we see here is just a microcosm of the abuse Jesus endures under Pontius Pilate. The Bible tells us they pull the beard out of his face. They spit on him. They mock him. They belittle him. They do everything possible to shame him. They strip him naked. They try to remove any sense of dignity he might have. He's treated as some sort of circus freak.

He's sent over to Herod for a little while. Pilate sends him to Herod. Herod wants Jesus to do miracles for him. Jesus refuses, so Herod then has him beaten and sent back to Pilate. This isn't even the crucifixion yet. This isn't carrying your cross... In fact, the beating Jesus endured before he was meant to carry his cross was so severe he *couldn't* carry his cross, so they had to pull a man out of the crowd, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the cross for Jesus to Golgotha, where they would drive nails through his hands and his feet.

The only way to breathe on the cross would be to push up on the nail driven through your feet in order to gasp to get air into your lungs to drop back down. You drowned in your own blood. The Romans had dialed in to the most excruciating, horrific way to die imaginable. "Suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried."

So what's going on? How can we look at that and go, "That's beautiful"? You're wearing a cross on your neck. That's a little crazy, isn't it? Like a little electric chair trinket. Like on that little Pandora bracelet of yours... "Oh, what's that?" "Oh, it's an electric chair." That's what we've done here. We've made one of the central symbols of the Christian faith the cross? That's what we've done? Well, yeah, because the death of Christ reconciles us to God.

Now I said a couple of weeks ago we all know something has gone wrong in us. There's a yearning; there's a desire for something more. That usually reveals itself as some sort of felt need. What I mean by that is we go, "Oh, my marriage is difficult. Oh, I have some addictions. Oh, I struggle with *this*. I really have an anger problem, or I really have *that*." I'm trying to tell you over and over again that those are symptoms of a greater problem. Those are symptoms of a greater disease.

The reality is those things, although they're significant issues, are not your ultimate issues but are actually sprouting from your ultimate issue. Your ultimate issue is that you and I were created by

God to commune with God and do life with one another. When sin entered the cosmos, it fractured both of those, so we're left hungry and thirsty with no real way to satisfy ourselves.

This is the refrain of the prophets. If you know your Bible, specifically Isaiah would say, "How long will you eat bread that doesn't satisfy you? How long will you drink water that does not quench your thirst?" The idea that there's a longing in us we just can't seem to satisfy. We just can't seem to get there, so we're constantly punting the ball down the field in the hope that this next thing will finally satisfy us.

That restlessness, that longing, that desire for more is what leads to all of the other fractures in your life. If you have an addiction issue, a relationship issue, or you name it, it's springing out of the ground of your soul knowing it was made for more. You're hungry, so you're trying to eat, but it doesn't satisfy. You're trying to drink, but it will not quench your thirst.

Christ's death on the cross reconciles us to God. It puts us back in Eden, if you're familiar with this language. Eden was created, where Adam and Eve communed richly with God and with one another, naked and unashamed, no guilt, no shame, no fear, no death. The death of Christ on the cross reconciles us back to what the heart needs most.

Now it's important to note here that the death of Christ on the cross in reconciling us to God, bringing us back into Eden, is Christ's death rescuing the enemies of God back to God. The Bible is clear that there are none righteous, not even one. In fact, I've tried to press gently but firmly over the last couple of weeks on the idea of you and me being good people.

The Bible is pretty clear that there's no one who's good. There's really no one who *is* good. If you think you're good, chances are you're comparing yourself with someone who's a moron, basically, and then you feel better about yourself because you're not *that* guy. Again, I continue to say to you that the Ten Commandments reveal that there's not a good person out there. There's not a good person in this room.

I don't have time to do the whole thing again, but we're good people, right? But we lie, so that makes us liars, right? "Well, not necessarily." No, if you lie, you're a liar. So we're lying, coveting, lustful, angry, impatient, God-belittling people, but we're good. I mean, we're good as we lie and covet and accuse God and have bursts of anger and doubt and struggle and belittle God. We're good people, though, as we do those things. Right?

There are none righteous, not one. In fact, we read it here earlier out of Isaiah. "All we like sheep have gone astray. Every one of us has turned and done his own thing, turned his own way." There are none righteous, not one. You are not a good person. I am not a good person. That's not what occurs. Christ's death on the cross reconciles the enemies of God back to God.

Now this shouldn't surprise us if we're reading the Bible through the correct lenses. The most common accusation made against Jesus Christ is that he was the friend of sinners. The blogosphere and the Twittersphere would hate Jesus' ministry. He was always hanging out with tax collectors and prostitutes and drunkards. I mean, this is the accusation made against him. "Jesus is the friend of sinners." Gosh, might that be said about *all* of us.

If you really read the Bible with your eyes open, it's stunning. Matthew, the tax collector, is called to be a disciple of Christ. Now I think we don't feel the weight of that, because if we grew up in church, we grew up with, "Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he." If you don't have a church background, you might be really confused right now, so don't worry about it.

What we've been told about tax collectors is that the reason the first-century Jews hated tax collectors is they were only supposed to take \$20 and instead they took \$50. That's part of the issue, but the greater issue is that a tax collector in first-century Jerusalem would have purchased the right from Rome to raise money to support an occupying force that was responsible for the murder and rape of hundreds of thousands of people.

There is no moral equivalent that I am aware of in the United States of America. Zacchaeus was a piece of trash. Matthew was a piece of trash. They sold out their neighbors and their family members for dollars. Jesus has the gall to call one of these brothers to be a disciple and to go eat at their house all the time? Jesus is the friend of sinners.

This is why I keep saying to you over and over again, "John 3:16 is awesome, but John 3:17 is just as awesome." He has come into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world from condemnation. The friend of sinners. Have you ever considered the group of disciples Jesus gathered? I mean, you're not getting anything done with *that* group. Yet Jesus comes to reconcile the enemies of God.

There are two ways to be an enemy of God. You can be an enemy of God with irreligion, wanting nothing to do with spiritual things. You have it. Don't worry about it. But you can also be an enemy of God by using religion to say the same thing the person using irreligion does. People use irreligion to say, "I don't need you, God; I've got this," but people will also use external moral religion to say, "I don't need you, God; I've got this."

So this brother or sister will use sex, drugs, money, wealth, the party scene, business, making money, or climbing the ladder to go, "I don't need you, God; I've got this." This person over here will say, "I have Sunday school and small group and worship, and I don't need you, God." They just use different tools to say the same thing to God. This is how we walk as enemies of God, and this is what Jesus has come by his death to reconcile back to God. It's a stunningly beautiful picture.

If you start reading the Bible again, during the life of Christ, you see him extending mercy to prostitutes and a woman living with a man. She had five husbands, and the man she was living with now wasn't her husband. It was like a sex-for-rent kind of thing going on. Yet Jesus has compassion. Jesus is merciful. Jesus is inviting them into the covenant community. He gets rid of the idea in first-century Judaism that they're outcasts and there's no place for them in the kingdom of God. He turns the spiritual economy upside down, and he woos and calls and rescues people we wouldn't hire on staff here.

After the ascension of Christ, which we'll get to in a couple of weeks, it just keeps going. Saul of Tarsus, who breathes murder and threat against the church of Jesus Christ, the moral modern-day equivalent of a commander in ISIS, rescued, saved, and reconciled to God in Christ. You have Lydia, who's a fashionista in Philippi. She has a house in Thyatira and a house in Philippi. That's Paris and New York. She was a dealer in purple cloth. All of the kids were wearing her gear. God-fearing, moral woman, not a Christian, saved, reconciled to God as an enemy of God.

You have the Philippian jailer, a former Roman soldier. He had been on the front lines, probably killed quite a few people, if you study the Roman Empire of that day. Now he's settled into blue-collar living. We know he's a cruel man. He puts Paul in stocks when he wasn't commanded to. He tortures Paul even though he wasn't commanded, wasn't told to. He's just a kind of brother who wants to watch a game and have a Natty Light. And what happens? Jesus reconciles a man who was abusing the apostle Paul.

Demon-possessed slave girl? Reconciled. Eunuch? Reconciled. We could go on and on. Jesus reconciles us to God. This is what he does. Jesus, the friend of sinners. I want to plead with you to not buy into the increasingly popular narrative of our day that wants to pretend that every kind of "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" that's in the Bible is some sort of antiquated, old-school, ridiculous, "need to get over it and get with the progressive times" type of madness. No, all of the commands of God in the Scripture are about lining you up with the best possible life.

It's God trying to get you into the lane of human flourishing and God reconciling you to himself by the blood of Christ. This is what the cross is all about. This is why it's beautiful. This is what it has to do with your life 2,000 years after its occurrence. Jesus' blood, his death on the cross, reconciles us to God. Nothing else will. Gosh, aren't you tired yet of trying to fix it? How long? This is Isaiah's pleading with Israel back in the day. "How long are you going to do this? How long? When does it stop? Aren't you tired enough yet?"

Then from there, not only does the death of Jesus reconcile us to God, but the death of Jesus purchases a people, creates the church. We see this most clearly in Acts 20:28. **"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God..."** Here's where you can highlight, underline, or just make a mental note. **"...which he obtained with his own blood."**

I don't need to say a lot about that except that what we see happening here is that the church was obtained, purchased, bought by the blood of Christ. You and I are here by the blood of Christ. I think if we want to talk about how that happens, we can look at 1 Peter 2:10. **"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."**

I love this survey. We're going to do a survey now. Even if you're in Fort Worth or Plano or Dallas, here's a survey so you can see, so you can look, so you can marvel. Anytime I talk about God creating a people, I want you to see this and feel this.

How many of you have master's degrees or doctorates, PhD's? Go ahead and raise your hand for me. I'm feeling terribly insecure all of a sudden. How many of you just have an undergraduate degree? That's my hand now. I'm just undergraduate degree. How many of you high school? All right, how many of you are like, "Nailed that GED, yo"? Raise your hand. How about just punted around the eighth or ninth grade and said, "Nope, I'm out"? Anybody?

How many of you became Christians after your twentieth birthday? After your thirtieth birthday? After your fortieth birthday? Anybody after your fiftieth birthday? After your sixtieth birthday? After your seventieth birthday? After your eightieth birthday? Wow! That's incredible. Okay, let's keep going. How many of you grew up with means? Mom and Dad had done well. You had some opportunities because Mom and Dad did well. Don't feel ashamed of that. That's awesome. How many of you just go, "Nope"? Okay, that's great.

Let's ask this one. How many of you grew up in homes where Mom and Dad taught you about Jesus, introduced you to the faith, dragged you to church? Okay, how many of you would say, "Nope"? Look around. Now one more. How many of you would say, "In my life, I have struggled at times significantly with drugs and alcohol and other addictions"? How many of you would go, "Nope"?

Okay, let me tell you what I'm doing here. I don't know what it looked like on the other campuses, but here's what I would tell you. One of the easier lies to spot in our day is that there is a type of person who becomes a Christian. We see that even in this room that's simply not true. What do you and I have in common? This is a crazy room right now. I mean, you have doctorates and dropped-out-in-the-seventh-grade. You guys are going to do Home Group together.

You have "Had some heroin issues" and "I've never cussed a real cussword in my life; one time in my head, but it was one that I invented," and you're going to do Home Group together. What could make us a people? The blood of Christ can. It's what brings us together. It makes us one. How many of you were born outside of the South? A lot of Yanks in here. Anybody outside the United States? Look at that. And look, here we are.

Look at what God has done. He has taken people from these different kinds of tracks, different backgrounds, different heartbreaks, different issues, different struggles, and he has put us together as a people. Yes, universally, but in *this* context localized. This is what God has done. It's only the blood of Christ that brings us together like this and creates an environment where we would serve, love, and lay down our lives for one another. This is a beautiful thing, purchased by the blood of Christ.

So if the death of Christ reconciles us to God and creates a covenant community, how do we plug that into our grid of *symmetry, clarity, community, and counsel*? So *symmetry*. How does this information help form us into more mature Christians? Well, maybe you're in here today and you

need to meditate on, consider, and think about the Word of God as it relates to your sin. You have a hard time believing your sin can be forgiven. Maybe you need to be encouraged and meditate on that your sins are forgiven.

Or maybe you're here and you need to develop some symmetry in the *other* direction. Maybe you think your sin is not that big of a deal. You've become lazy when it comes to the sin in your life. You don't think sin is that serious. Hey, listen. One of the reasons the grotesque, horrific, violent death of Jesus needs to be considered, thought about, and gazed upon is because it helps you understand how much God hates sin, *all* sin.

If you want to know how badly God hates sin, look only to the cross of Christ and the reality of hell. If you want to know the weight of sin, look only to the cross of Christ and the reality of hell. So maybe you need to gaze upon the forgiveness of God and let that develop some better symmetry. Maybe you need to gaze upon the wrath of God and let that develop some greater symmetry.

Now when it comes to *clarity*, just one thing. Look right at me as I say this. If you are in Christ, you are fully and completely forgiven. No caveats. No asterisks. No "what abouts." No "what ifs." In Christ, all of your sin, past, present, and future is fully absorbed in the cross of Jesus Christ, which is what we'll talk about next week.

I've tried to say often, and I'm going to say it again, there is no sin imaginable with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ. There's just not. There's no sin imaginable with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ. You have to stop with thinking you're the caveat, you're the asterisk, you're the one. The Bible is a bullhorn in this realm.

It's unimaginable that Christ's death on the cross would reconcile the Philippian jailer who was actively torturing a man of God. It's hard to get your mind around the rescue and ransom of Saul of Tarsus. As you look at ISIS beheading children and women, you're not thinking, "One of those would make a great missionary." You're thinking, if you're like me, "Can't we just kill them all? Can't we just drop a bomb on all of that?"

But that's not how God worked with Saul of Tarsus. No, he saved him. He reconciled the enemies of God back to God. The demonic slave girl... On and on and on we could go. Christ is the friend of sinners. He reconciles. Do you think you're exempt? How? How is your sin more horrific than this?

How is your sin more horrific than what we read and see in the Bible? Listen to me. In Christ, his death has set you free. You're forgiven.

Now that we have symmetry and clarity, what should that do for our *community*? The death of Jesus Christ is the bedrock upon which our community is built. There are 51 "one anothers" in the New Testament. I'm not going to go through them, because there are 51 of them, but it's, "Love one another, serve one another, defer to one another, greet one another, encourage one another, speak life into one another, show preference to one another, outdo one another in honor." On and on and on I could go.

The Bible creates this space by the blood of Christ, where we begin to be a counterculture to the world around us. Part of that is the optimism I spoke of last week, but part of it is how we love one another and serve one another and speak life into one another. Even Christ himself said they would know we are Christians by our love for one another.

Let's be straight. I never want to talk about community where we're not really honest. People are difficult. You get on people's nerves, don't you? You thought I was going somewhere else with that, didn't you? *You* get on people's nerves. That's hard to believe though. You? No, I just must not know you, right? There's no way you get on someone's nerves. Look at me. I love you. You get on someone's nerves.

In that, by the grace of God, because of the blood of Christ, they are patient, kind, gracious, longsuffering even, because they have experienced those things by the blood of Christ themselves. Community isn't easy. See, we're more connected than ever and more lonely than ever. We were meant to do life deeply and richly with one another in a given location, to serve, care, defer, and be optimistic together. Even in the most difficult times, to be optimistic together.

This is how the death of Jesus reconciling us to God and creating community affects how we think about our community of faith. It is why for the rest of the time you give me this little face mic or whatever comes in the future I will say you should belong to a church, not just go to one. Church is not meant by God to be an ecclesiological buffet.

Now the last. How do we *counsel* ourselves? I think this is a huge one. One of the reasons this all is so hard to believe... It's kind of crazy sounding, right? Free love? That's impossible. We know free love doesn't exist. That's why some of us have to put on makeup to go to the gym. We know free

love doesn't exist. That's why we're used car salesmen, always having our best up front. "How are you?" "I'm great."

We know free love doesn't work. It's why we work so hard to earn the approval and respect of others, because love isn't free. We're hearing from the Bible God say, "No, no, no. The love of Christ is free. The blood of Christ has been spilled so I can fully love you, completely love you, completely forgive you, and be a just, righteous God. You're fully and freely forgiven forever." We know that can't be true. That's difficult. Here's why it's difficult. I say this a lot. If you're a guest, this will be new. If you've been here, you're like, "Oh gosh, *this* again."

The reason this is hard to believe is that, for whatever reason, we're such a ridiculously navel-gazing group of human beings we can't hardly see the good news for all the bad we're looking at in our navel. Here's what we do. "Oh gosh, I wish I could do this, Chandler, but golly, I really stink right now. I'm struggling with this. I hear you, but if you had any idea of how I struggle with sexual orientation, how badly I struggle with drugs, how I struggle with lust..."

I'm saying to you God knows, so he publicly put it out there, "I know. I got you. I get it." He knows it's scary to be us. Hebrews says he's an empathetic high priest. He is the friend of sinners. Not the *enemy* of sinners, the *friend* of sinners. The cross is a visceral, visible picture of the love of God for you in Christ. He knows, "Get your eyes off your goofy, confused self, and look to the cross."

This is how the Bible says we're transformed: by beholding the glory of Christ, not by being intimately aware of all of our shortcomings and failures. Do you think you need to study that? Doesn't that present itself to you all the time? Look to the cross. That's why we have a cross on our necklace. If that's not true, then we're stupid people. Look to the cross. Consider the blood of Christ. That's what's happening on the cross.

You have these crazy verses in the Bible. Let me show you a couple of them. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith..."**

We just talked about that on counsel. We're counseling ourselves, "Look to Jesus. I know I stink. I get it. I'm going to look to Jesus, because Jesus doesn't. He's awesome; I'm not. So I'm going to keep my eyes where it's awesome." Look at what comes next. **"...who for the joy that was set before**

him endured the cross... By the way, this is one of those verses that helped me tease out the difference between *joy* and *happiness*, that you can be happy without any roots, and that happiness is really built more on circumstance, but that joy is unwavering and unshaking regardless of circumstances.

If you study the story of the cross, as Jesus is beaten, mocked, belittled, spit upon, beard pulled out of his face, thorns jammed into his skull, struck with staffs, stripped naked in front of a crowd that hurls insults on him... As he's nailed to the cross and drowns in his own blood, nailed to a piece of wood that he spoke into existence, held up by steel that he created, iron that he allowed to exist... As the breath left his body upon absorbing all of God's wrath toward mankind, what is the joy set before him? That's a peculiar line. "**...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...**"

Well, there's a cascading effect, and it's important that we understand how it cascades. First and foremost, the joy set before Christ on the cross was in glorifying God. He was going to bring glory to God. In fact, he says that on repeat. They didn't *take* his life; he *gave* his life. It's so important to know they didn't kill Jesus as much as Jesus laid down his life. He even says that. "The Father loves me because I laid my life down, only to pick it up again. Nobody is killing me; I'm giving my life for a ransom of many."

So Jesus' primary joy is in bringing glory to God, but think through it. How does the death of Christ bring glory to God? By reconciling us to God. So in this cascading way, you and I are the joy set before Christ on that day. We read later in Galatians 1:15-16... As Saul of Tarsus is talking about his conversion, he says, "But when God who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his Son in me..."

Let me ask a quick question. How many of you can in your wildest dreams believe that on the day you were converted the heart of God was pleased? If the heart of God was pleased when you were an enemy of God, how much more is the heart of God now pleased in your progressive sanctification, even if *you* wish you were farther along? Do you believe that in Christ God can look upon you and be pleased? Even if you're not a Christian you should want this to be true.

I said last week at the end of the service that I have not read in all of philosophy and religion a more compelling, beautiful story than what we read here in our Scriptures. You get to stop striving and rest in the accomplished work of Jesus Christ. You don't have to *do*; you get to *be*. You get to melt

back into Eden. The blood of Jesus reconciles us to God and makes a people, puts our hearts back where they were meant to be: in communion with God and in community with one another.

Brothers and sisters, this is the invitation that's out there for all of us, for the Christian to be reminded and encouraged and for the non-Christian to hear that Jesus is not your enemy. He has not come to take from you anything other than what might ultimately harm or kill your soul and rob you from what you actually need. So if you've been cut on, difficult things happened in life, that's not punitive as much as it's surgical. Jesus yields his scalpel lightly to cut out what might kill us and provide for us what might bring the fullness of life.

So when we talk about Jesus suffering under Pontius Pilate, being crucified, dead, and buried, those are factual statements, but the truth, the weight, is really underneath the facts. That's really the answer to Pilate's question, "What is truth?" The truth is a man, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, our Lord. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for our time together just to consider Jesus, to consider the death of Jesus, to consider the beauty of Jesus. I pray right now for my brothers and sisters who maybe doubt your ability to forgive. Holy Spirit, I just pray that you would open eyes, that you would do the work of illumination, that you might help hearts understand and know that your forgiveness is robust and complete if they'll repent and put their faith in you.

Father, I pray for those who think sin is no big deal. I pray that in the violence of the cross, in the agony of the death of God the Son, second person of the Trinity, they would see and feel the weight of their sin and their rebellion against you, whether that rebellion be irreligious or religious, and I pray that they might fling themselves at your mercy and become part of this people you have formed and created. Your generosity, God, is astounding. We thank you and praise you. It's for your beautiful name we pray, amen.

We're going to end our time together in celebrating the Lord's Supper. While they're handing out the elements, let me say this. We provide Communion primarily for our members, but if you're a guest with us today who's a believer in the gospel that you just heard preached, then you are our brother and sister in Christ, and we want you to celebrate with us. It's a good, right thing for you to celebrate with us. So why don't you take the elements, and we'll take together here as a family in just a bit.

Let me say this. If you're not a Christian, you're here and you heard me but you're not quite sure where you land, not quite sure what you believe, will you do me a favor? Will you abstain? Will you just let the elements pass? I'm not trying to make you feel like an outsider or anything like that. This for us is an extremely sacred moment, where we remember we have been reconciled to God in the death of Jesus Christ. So will you just let the elements pass for now? I pray that one day you'll join us at this Table and rejoice in what Christ has done for you, but for now will you just let it pass?

While we begin to meditate and consider, before we take Communion, I have two questions I want to put on the board that are really meant to help you think and pray and confess. Here are the two questions. In which ways do you doubt the forgiveness of God? Are there places where you're doubting the forgiveness of God?

In which ways do you live like sin is no big deal at all? In which ways have you become lazy about putting sin to death in your life? I want you to think through those, pray through those two questions, and then in a moment I'll be back, and we'll take the Lord's Supper together as a family, we'll sing a little bit, and then be dismissed. Why don't you consider, pray, and meditate?

Brothers and sisters, will you stand with me? Again, if you're not a Christian or aren't comfortable standing, that's fine. You can stay seated. Why don't you take a minute to look around? Here we are, the people of God, different backgrounds, different stories, different struggles, yet all here today as trophies of the grace of God, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, standing by no righteousness of our own.

There's nothing we've done to earn it, no goodness in us to be spoken of. Anything we would point to that is good and lovely has been given to us by the blood of Christ, so we stand today as trophies of the grace of God. What an astounding, merciful God, that he has brought us together in this way, in this time, in this place. Who knows what all he's up to?

The Bible says that on the night Jesus was arrested, he took the bread and broke it, and he said, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal, he took the cup and blessed the cup, and he called the cup the blood of the new covenant. We were going to need to be reminded that we're no longer under the old covenant of needing to make sacrifices, needing to try to right ourselves, of letting there be another blood to lead to the remission of sins, but rather

the blood of Christ would be the remission of our sins once and for all for those who are being saved.

There was this day coming where Christ was going to make all things new. We were going to be prone to forget, so he says, "As long as you gather, as long as you get together, drink the cup in remembering, in looking back, but also in looking forward at the return of Christ and the consummation of all things." So this morning, as a body of believers, we remember together.

Brothers and sisters, let me simply say this to you. If you're here today and you have struggled with the notion that God could forgive you in Christ, we're going to have some brothers and sisters of ours stand up front. They're here to pray for you, to encourage you. Will you trust me in this? You have nothing in your background that will make anybody up here gasp or freak out or need to make a call in order to get some counsel to help you. Will you let us love you and serve you?

Or maybe your testimony is you have never believed, and maybe the Holy Spirit in his mercy today has turned on the lights, and you see and believe. Will you let us know that? Will you let us encourage you and help you know what comes next in that? Or maybe you're here and sin hasn't been that big of a deal to you, and now maybe for the first time in the brutality of the cross you see the weight of that silly sin you thought was no big deal. Again, maybe those things are going to require some help and some time, things like Recovery, things like counseling. We want to just love and serve you. That's what we're here for.

We're going to sing a little bit more. There are some men and women up here waiting for you to pray for you and encourage you. Then Michael will release us with a benediction near the end. But for now, we're going to sing a song called "Sovereign Over Us," a beautiful song about the kingly reign and rule of God over our lives and him never abandoning us or leaving us. So let's sing together as a family. Love you guys.