

Communion Meditation: Mercy

Communion Meditation

By Don Green

Bible Verse: 1 John 1:5-2:2
Preached on: Sunday, January 28, 2018

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For our Scripture reading that will double as our preparation for Communion, I invite you to turn to the letter of 1 John at the back of your New Testament. 1 John 1. I'm going to read from chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 2, verse 2, as it points us so clearly and evidently to Christ incarnate, to Christ crucified, to Christ resurrected. 1 John 1, beginning in verse 1 says this,

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- 2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- 3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. 5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

As we come to the Communion Table, we are reminded that God's intentions toward us are good. That's the only possible explanation that you could have for the things that we just read in Scripture. God in his goodness, God in his grace sent the Lord Jesus Christ

into the world to live a perfect life and to offer that perfect life as a sacrifice on behalf of sinners who are not perfect, indeed who were rebels and are rebels against this holy God of goodness and of grace. As we prepare for Communion, then, my friends, I invite you to remember Christ first and Christ foremost; that it was his willingness to come into the earth in accordance with the Father's plan, it was his willingness to voluntarily lay down his life for sinners just like you; it was his perfect shed blood spilled at the cross of Calvary that alone could satisfy the righteous wrath of God against your sin and against mine. Christ's death on the cross was a work of atonement bearing God's wrath against your sins, or to use a different metaphor that Christ is described with here in verse 7 of the passage we read, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

My friends, do you understand that there is nothing that you could do to wash away your own sin? Do you realize that there are no works, no rituals that you can do that would satisfy the infinite debt that you have toward God for your violations of his law? For your indifference toward him? For your failure to love him with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind? Do you realize there's nothing you can do, that you are helpless before a holy God? That's where an understanding of salvation begins, is to realize that Christ came for sinners just like you, and that blood of which the Apostle John speaks is a reference to his sacrifice on the cross for our sins, and when he says that it cleanses us, that it washes our sins away, it has the idea that for the one who has put his faith in Christ, God no longer holds their sins against them. If you have put your faith in Christ, God no longer holds your sins against you. There is no further penalty to be paid. There are no works to be done to complete salvation. It's not like Christ started it and then you have to finish it. No, his sacrifice was a complete and perfect atonement for sinners just like you.

My friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I would remind you of something that is so very precious. If you have your Bible open to 1 John 1, look at the end of verse 7. 1 John 1:7 where it says "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Not part of it. Not the socially acceptable sins but the dark sins, even the dark sins in your life, the things that still bring pain to your mind and to your conscience when it has come to your attention, when it's brought to your mind; to understand that the blood of Christ is a thorough cleansing agent from sin; that there is no stain left when his work is applied to your soul and that God looks at you and sees the righteousness of Christ. It is imputed to you as a gift and for the one who has put his faith in Christ, God accepts the righteousness of Christ, the shed blood of Christ as the only righteousness he requires from you and that, my friend, is liberating. That is wonderful to know that all of the burden of guilt and sin has been lifted from your shoulders and placed on Christ where it was punished once-for-all. That is the message of the Gospel, that Christ is such a Savior as that; that his blood is such a perfect atonement for sinners that those who simply receive him in believing faith, in a repentant faith, find that all of the righteous demands of God are satisfied in Christ and shared freely as a gift to unworthy sinners like you and me.

The Bible tells us that the one who has put his faith in Jesus Christ has been declared righteous before a holy God. Do you understand that? That God's requirement for

righteousness, according to the law, you can never meet, but his gift, the offer in salvation is that the fullness of righteousness is fulfilled in you when you are joined to Christ by putting your faith in him. The Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 2:24 that Jesus "bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." Why are we making that point now? Well, so that it would be fresh in our minds when we come to the Communion Table; so that when we hold that bread and hold that cup in our hands, that tangible symbol that the Lord ordained for us to remember him by until he comes; that we would have a visual reminder that a full salvation has been applied to our souls. I'll go back to the hymn I quoted in the water, "O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole has been nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!" To come to Communion, then, is to be reminded of that which is the deepest joy, the deepest hope, the greatest satisfaction that there is. Nothing else matters by comparison.

So, my Christian friend, I ask you: did you come today feeling the weight of some sin perhaps recent in your life, perhaps even this past week, perhaps even this morning? I invite you to look fresh to the wounds of Christ and remember that the blood of Jesus Christ continually cleanses you from all sin and that God is gracious and glad and finds joy in forgiving sinners. Scripture says the angels in heaven rejoice over the repentance of even one, more so than over 99 people who need no repentance.

If you're not a Christian, and I know that some of you are not, the good news of the Gospel is that Christ has paid a full ransom price for the forgiveness of sin. You can be saved this moment by coming to Christ in faith. The threat of hell can be removed instantaneously if you cry out to Christ for salvation. You see, God promises in his word to remove our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. He says in the book of Hebrews and elsewhere that, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." My unsaved friend, why would you walk away from a gift like that, knowing the judgment of God is upon sinners? Knowing that death awaits you, because it awaits every one of us? Knowing that judgment is on the other side of death? How could you bear the thought of appearing before a holy God unforgiven, especially when forgiveness is offered to you freely right now in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ?

So as we come to the Lord's Table, this passage in 1 John reminds us that we come in one sense as sinners because it says that if we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. We are humbled as we come to this Table but we are greatly encouraged realizing that God has provided a salvation for us that is complete, that is final, that is utterly trustworthy.

Now to come as a sinner might sound like you're coming in a place of weakness or in despair. In one sense, yes, we come in weakness as sinners, we come in weakness in our flesh, but you see, that's not our point of emphasis at the Communion Table. The point of emphasis at the Communion Table is Christ and his power, Christ and his accomplishment, Christ and all that he has done for sinners like us. In 1 John 2:1, we see that it's more than just an atonement for sinners that Christ is to us, that he, in himself, is

the satisfaction that God requires, but there's something more, there's something even more wonderful or something additionally wonderful, maybe better said. John says, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," but as we come as Christians to the cross, as we come to the Table, we are remembering that not only has Christ made a perfect sacrifice for our sins, but he is now exalted in heaven after the ascension having gone to heaven at the right hand of God where he represents us in the very throne room of God. What a great Savior! He met the demands of the law on your behalf. The law no longer condemns you and now Christ is as to us as an older brother in heaven representing us before the Father having perfectly satisfied all of the demands of God on our behalf. That's pretty wonderful, isn't it?

As we sang earlier, "And now for me He stands before the Father's throne. He shows His wounded hands and names me as His own." Not a generic, general atonement made for a blob of sinners someplace for them to sort out later whether they'll believe it or not. No, Christ made an actual atonement for sinners and accomplished all that was necessary for our security of soul, for our forgiveness to be achieved, and for that we give him all of the glory.

Those thoughts on the atonement and those thoughts on Christ, our Advocate, frame our hearts as we come to this Table. Christian, I remind you and it's a blessed privilege to do so, that Christ has interceded for you. A loving Savior has stood in the breach, stood in the gap between you and God and made a perfect propitiation. He, himself, is the propitiation for your sins. He, himself, has done everything needed for the wrath of God to be turned away from you and if your faith is in Christ for your salvation, you are fully reconciled to this God and he freely invites you to come to this Table of remembrance on behalf of our elder brother who loved us and gave himself up for us, and we remember his death on our behalf as we come to the Table. The Lord has appointed this to be a blessing, an encouragement, a strength and a help to your soul and that's the spirit in which we take it and as we will take it in just a moment.

If you're not a Christian or if you're a Christian living in sin that you're not willing to confess and forsake, let me ask you on behalf of Christ not to sully this remembrance by taking the elements and pretending to be a part of this celebration of his atonement for sin when in reality you push it away and you want nothing to do with him. It would be better for you to let the elements pass if you're not truly in Christ and contemplate instead the words of Scripture that we have had before us here in these past few moments.

I'm going to bow and ask you to bow with me in prayer and as I do, the men are going to come to begin to distribute the bread and Larry will come back and lead us in singing, "There is a Redeemer." Let's bow together in prayer as the men come.

Father, we commit this time to you. We ask for your grace to be upon us as we remember our Lord crucified, risen, and ascended, the perfect sacrifice for sinners just like us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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