

Delivered From Sin

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[0 : 0 0] Checkity check, microphone check, micro microphone check. All right. All right. Let's lay down some track. All right. Good morning.

My name is Anthony. I get to serve as the lead pastor here at the Table Church. And I've done that for a couple of years now. And hey, I'm going to go ahead and ask, can we turn the house lights on?

I'd like to see you all. It's not like there's such an overwhelming number of you that I'm going to be scared. So hello. I feel like this is one of those weekends, just one of those random weekends in D.C.

where like half the town decides to skip down for, I mean, maybe they should have told us something. Like, I don't know what's going down. But I'm glad you're here. Hello. Hello. We are in the smack dab middle of a series about the book of Exodus.

And more than just the book of Exodus, which is this second book in the library that we call the Bible, but also the theme of Exodus. The Exodus is this overriding theme throughout all of Scripture that really informs what the Bible is about.

[1 : 0 4] And so we've been talking about all the different ways that God is exodus-ing us, delivering us, saving us from a variety of things, from exhaustion, deliverance into Sabbath, from commodity, deliverance from being made into commodities ourselves.

We've been delivered into celebration, which Lexi talked about last week. And this week we're going to talk about a thorny issue, a word that's not as popular today.

That's the idea of being delivered from sin. And before we do all of that, I'd like to pray with you. I know that there are a variety of needs represented in this room, in our lives, in our neighbors, in families' lives, in our country and in our world.

So would you just take a moment and pray with me today? Good, gracious, almighty, triune God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer, we come to you this morning as your beloved children, your people, a people known by grace, a people that you have called God made in your divine image.

And so there is no one who is not worthy of dignity, value, and respect. And I thank you, God, for this church and for the people who are gathered here and the people who make up its members and its ranks and its family, God, that we are a people who, in many ways, so many of us have been pushed aside, marginalized, forgotten about.

[2 : 4 2] And this is a church where that can be turned around and redeemed. God, I know that there are so many stories of heartache, hurt, pain, and brokenness represented here or our folks watching online or just anybody who calls the table their home.

God, I think of those who have been affected by sickness and death. God, we ask for your grace, for your healing, and for your comfort in grief.

I think about those who have been affected by the things going on on the other side of the world in Ukraine and those who have loved ones or friends who are there.

And God, we continue to ask and beg and work towards peace. God, I think about those who they are looking ahead to a holiday this Easter and they don't have a home to go to or a family to call their own.

And God, I pray that firm boundaries may be set and kept and that where there is a will for reconciliation that you would be in the midst of it.

[3 : 59] Where there is bigotry or hatred or prejudice or pride, God, with the power of your love, wreck it down. And God, I pray for us here this morning who are about to hear your word proclaimed.

Words that have been used to hurt or to harm or have been twisted against us, God, I pray, would be untwisted and instead bent towards love, inclusion, beauty, and justice.

And God, if I may play some part in that, may it be so. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Now, words like sin.

Words are these slippery things that tend to gain and lose meaning over time. And so let me throw a few examples on the screen.

Throw up that first one, Skylar. Cloud. And now, let's do some audience participation here. Without thinking about computers, what is a cloud? A puffy thing in the sky.

[5 : 03] Yeah, it's moisture up in the sky. Next slide. But what is the cloud? It's a database data. One of my favorite T-shirts is, the cloud is just other people's computers.

Okay? Okay, you're just putting your information on other people's computers. Next slide. Okay, what is the animal, a catfish? Delicious.

Right, it's a fish with whiskers. Next slide. What does it mean to be catfished? To be played. Got. Got. That's good.

Next one. Cancel. Payment. Cancel your payment. Call your cable company and say, please, no more. Next one. Canceled.

Eliminated. Man, you guys, you're all fast. Next one. Like. What does it mean to like something? Pre-internet.

[6 : 01] Pre-internet. Crush. Yeah. Oh, do you like them or like like them? Yep. Next slide. Like with a thumbs up. Oh, yeah, yeah. I saw that. I saw that online.

I liked it. Yeah. I hearted it. All those sorts of things. Next one. Forgiveness of sins. All right. Now we're turning our attention to some scriptural, biblical stuff. Now, forgiveness of sins is one of these phrases or words that has gained and lost meaning over time.

Now, the story that I have heard and perhaps many of you, if you've been around the church for any time, I've heard may look something like this. Next one. This is from Navigators.

They're a campus ministry group. I like, I'll confess, like I give money. We have some friends who are partners with Navigators. They do wonderful work in terms of discipleship, helping college students through like really, really difficult times.

Sometimes, like I am not anti-Navigators, okay? But they've got this analogy that they've used for decades called the bridge about what it is to be forgiven of our sin or what the gospel is, what it is to be saved.

[7 : 07] And so it starts with point number one. You've got God and God loves you and God wants to give you eternal life. But two, our problem is that we can't get to God and God can't get to us.

So the solution is that Jesus died for our sins and Jesus brings us to God and all we have to do is believe and receive and then Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with us.

Now, this smacks of truth, but my issue with it is that it fails to tell the whole story. It fails to take into account how the Bible itself describes the gospel and salvation.

It fails to actually make known all of what God intends for humanity. And I'll give you just a few scriptural examples. There's this letter that St. Paul gave to the Church of Colossae somewhere in the 60s CE or AD, depending on what you want to call it.

And Paul writes this. He says, Now, you've got some cross language.

[8 : 23] You've got some blood language. You've got some of that stuff. But you also have this big, large, cosmic language about Jesus reconciling all things to himself. Things on earth, things in heaven.

This is big language that that bridge analogy doesn't really take into account. Next one. This is St. Paul to the Church of Ephesus, written around the same time.

Paul writes, God's purpose is now to show the rulers and powers in the heavens the many different varieties of his wisdom through the church. And if you were with us about a month or so ago, I preached on the idea of the powers.

The powers are these invisible realities that have some sort of shaping effect in our lives and the life of the world. And so God's purpose now is to show those rulers and powers in the heavens the wisdom through the church.

And this was consistent with the plan that God had from the beginning of time that he accomplished through Christ Jesus our Lord. Now that bridge analogy doesn't take into account. It doesn't mention anything about the powers that shape our lives and the world.

[9 : 23] It doesn't mention it at all. Next one. This is also from the book of Ephesus. It says, Christ is our peace, and he made both Jews and Gentiles into one group.

With Jesus' body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us. He canceled the detailed rules here, that word canceled, of the law so that he could create... Jesus, number one canceler.

So that he could create one new humanity out of the two groups, making peace. He reconciled them both as one body to God by the cross, which ended the hostility to God.

Not God's hostility to us, but hostility to God. Again, that bridge analogy doesn't mention anything about some sort of ethnic reconciliation, about two groups becoming one.

It's very individualistic. It's just me and Jesus, and we're all kumbaya. But the whole idea of bringing entire ethnicities together through the cross, bridge analogy, and like examples of preaching the gospel, don't mention this.

[10 : 26] Now, another issue with the whole, like, you know, Jesus died on the cross in order to forgive our sins, has a problem, is that Jesus forgives sin prior to the cross.

There are stories of Jesus encountering people, and Jesus saying, you are forgiven, but this is all pre-Jesus dying on the cross. And typical stories about the gospel, about why the cross had to happen, say, well, Jesus had to do that so God could forgive us.

Well, then what was Jesus up to prior to dying on the cross? Where did forgiveness come from? Jesus must have been breaking the rules somehow, or maybe there's something true about God that we haven't been told.

And the other issue with the bridge analogy is that Jesus' primary message is about the kingdom of God. Jesus doesn't go around talking a whole lot about the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus doesn't go around a whole lot and talk about God's anger towards us, and God wishes that God could be reconciled to us, but God can't, and so Jesus has to do something about it. No, rather, Jesus goes around, and his primary message is that the kingdom of God has arrived.

[11 : 35] The kingdom of God has showed up. If I am in your midst, and if I am healing people, Jesus says, then the kingdom of God is here. That's what Jesus talks about constantly.

His parables, his sermons, his messages, his healings are all about the kingdom of God, about the rule, the reign, the way of God being true on earth as it is in heaven.

And that bridge analogy, God is separated from you. God had to figure out a way to get to you, so Jesus had to die on a cross, doesn't mention the kingdom at all. Doesn't mention ethnic reconciliation at all.

Doesn't mention the rulers and the powers in the heavens and on earth at all. And the reason we're talking about all of this, and the reason that we're pivoting from Exodus to big Exodus, the scripture-wide Exodus, is that we're coming up to Palm Sunday in Easter in the next couple weeks.

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, where we remember Jesus entering into Jerusalem. The Sunday after that is Easter, where we remember cross and resurrection. And I want us to have a clear-eyed perspective on what those stories are about.

[12 : 42] Because if we limit it and reduce it to God was angry at you and had to figure out a way to round that, then we're missing the message. We're missing the story.

Now, here's, you know, what some of these things on the bridge analogy don't say. Next slide. It says in part one, God wants to give us eternal life, but he can't.

That's as if there is some sort of judge or justice that ranks higher than God, God's self, that God is appealing to. Well, I'd love to love these people. I'd love to give them eternal life.

But I, you know, my hands are tied. I'm forced to not be able to do that unless, you know, somebody else suffers or dies in their place. And so then you get to Jesus died for us.

Next slide. Because the only way God could let us get into heaven is if someone suffered. This is often the way that the gospel gets explained, gets told to us.

[13 : 44] So let me quote from the bishop and professor Nicholas Thomas Wright. Go to that next slide. This is me. This is a picture I took creeping on him.

I took a sabbatical a few years ago and went up to Vancouver and took a class with him, which was fantastic. Actually, I went to the bathroom next to Tom Wright. It was great. But this is like the book signing line.

And I'm quoting from that book that's right there in the picture. And he says this. It says, It is an important and easily overlooked feature of the gospels. The four evangelists deliberately and explicitly construct a picture of Jesus's death, not in terms of an angry father lashing out at an innocent and defenseless son, but in terms of somebody embodying the love of God himself, acting as the personal expression of that love all the way to his death.

So here you've got, you know, no more official of a writer than one of the bishops of the Church of England saying, The way that the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, explain Jesus's death is not about an angry father lashing out at a son, but about God, God's self, expressing love to the point of death.

An analogy for this would be, anybody know what a compound fracture is? What's a compound fracture? The bone comes out of your body.

[15 : 17] Yeah. Don't Google image search this. That was a rough day when I put this together. This is the least offensive picture I could find. Yeah, yeah. So a normal fracture, you know, the bone is broken.

Compound fracture, it is sticking out of your body. Okay? Now imagine you get one of these compound fractures. You go to the doctor, the ER, the urgent care center, and they're like, wow, that's a pretty bad scrape you've got there.

Here's a Band-Aid to cover up the skin. You'd be like, excuse me. It's a little worse than that. Okay? Similarly, when we get things like the bridge analogy, that say, hey, Jesus came, died for your sins, so you can be forgiven and go to heaven.

That's the same thing as if a doctor is looking at your broken bone and saying like, hey, here's a Band-Aid. Of course, God wants to care and do something about sin, and we'll talk about what that word means.

But it's so much bigger, grander, better than that. Lisa Sharon Harper, in her book, *The Very Good Gospel*, tells this story about speaking to some college ministry staff.

[16 : 24] And she asks, what is the gospel? And this was a particularly provocative question for these staff members who were experts at communicating the good news of the gospel as it had been handed down to them.

And you can imagine something like the bridge analogy. They knew all manner of frameworks and diagrams to make the message simple. But beneath the surface of their successful frameworks, avoid occupied the center of the message.

Next slide. The group formed four teams to examine the New Testament gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They had 20 minutes to discern each gospel writer's understanding of the good news.

And when the time was up, this diverse group of men and women came back together to share what they had discovered. And these accomplished ministry staff members were amazed. The good news of the gospel writers was not quite the good news they had been preaching.

The gospel writers' vision was much bigger. The team members found that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all did care about an individual's reconciliation with God, self, and their communities.

[17 : 28] But the gospel writers also focused on systemic justice, peace between people groups, freedom for the oppressed. The good news was both about the coming of the kingdom of God and the character of that kingdom.

It was about what God's kingdom looked like. It was about what citizenship in God's kingdom requires. The biblical gospel writers' good news was about the restoration of Shalom.

And if you want to know more about Shalom, you can read the very gospel. Shalom is this Hebrew concept of wholeness and health and peace worldwide. Now, what does this all have to do with the idea of forgiveness of sins?

Forgiveness of sins is one of these words or phrases that has lost and gained meaning over the centuries to be a little bit the biblical writers used it.

Now, Jesus did use the phrase. In a little bit, we're going to do communion, and Jesus is going to say, he's going to pick up a cup, he's going to say, drink it. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for what?

[18 : 31] For the forgiveness of sins. But notice that even in this passage, there's a connection between forgiveness and my Father's kingdom. I'm not going to drink from the fruit of this vine again until I drink it with you in my Father's kingdom.

So Jesus does talk about forgiveness of sins, but it's connected somehow to this idea of shalom, of peace, of God's rule and reign and kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. It's not quite the same thing as this, hey, individualistic, God wants to make it right with you sort of reductionistic thing that some of us have been handed down.

And the way that we understand what forgiveness of sins is, is the idea of exodus and exile. Exodus and exile. Exodus and exile are the overriding themes of the entire Hebrew Bible, so Old Testament, and the New Testament, the Christian scriptures as well.

If we want to make sense of almost anything that's happening in the Bible, we need to understand exodus and exile. So let's do a little bit of timeline, get you historically caught up here.

So the exodus, the thing where the Israelites left Egypt and started making their way towards the promised land, towards Canaan, happened around 1300 or 1200 BCE.

[19 : 49] About 300 to 400 years after that, the first temple was built. So this is Solomon's temple, and you can read about that in the books of Kings. And then about 400 years after that, Jerusalem is burned and the temple is destroyed.

So a whole bunch of history we're skipping over here. We're skipping all over like Kings and Chronicles and prophets, kingdom being divided, lots of things that we're skipping over. But the first temple is built, and then the temple is destroyed, and Jerusalem is burned down brick by brick.

This moment where Jerusalem is destroyed, you can read about it in the book of Lamentations, is as massive to the Israelites as the exodus was, but the negative version, all right?

Exodus is celebration and joy. We're leaving slavery. We're being delivered into celebration. The destruction of the temple is this massive moment that defines Judaism for the next two millennia, where they are forced out of their country.

The place where they understood God to reside is destroyed, and God's glory doesn't live with them anymore. About 50 years later, Cyrus begins, go back a slide, please, to allow folks to return to Jerusalem.

[21 : 06] And then a Persian king, Artaxerxes, allows them to start rebuilding the Jerusalem walls and the temple. And then about 500 years later, Jesus shows up on the scene. Now, quick aside about biblical prophecy stuff.

This is things that you haven't heard me talk about a lot in the past two years, but I'm still like a bit of a Bible prophecy nerd. And like, trust me, you've heard me preach like sermons that would kick me out of other churches about like the Bible.

It's got mistakes. How about that? But there are still some moments in the Bible that are just amazing to me. Next slide. Book of Daniel. Daniel writes that 483 years for the going forth of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of the Messiah.

So this prophecy that gives explicit details about the years from when the Jews are allowed to rebuild the temple and rebuild Jerusalem to when the Messiah is going to show up.

And 457 is when Artaxerxes authorizes the rebuilding of the Jerusalem walls. And then 27 CE is when Jesus' public ministry begins. And next slide.

[22 : 11] Look at that. It's around 483 years. Book of Daniel was written years, hundreds of years before Jesus. And Daniel nails it somehow.

Somehow. Don't know how that could be. Maybe it's a divine miracle. Anyway, that's not really the point of today's sermon, but I thought you ought to know. Next one. Next slide. So these are the big themes of Scripture.

Exodus, which shapes every other story about God going with the people. Exile. Our land has been destroyed. We've been kicked out of it. Then we're allowed to go back in and rebuild the temple.

But when the temple was rebuilt, there's this sense from writers of the time, and you can see this in Scripture, that it wasn't...

It's like the exile was still going. It's like the exile never really ended. Yeah, we're back in our place. We're back in our land. Yeah, we've rebuilt the Jerusalem walls.

[23 : 14] Yeah, we've rebuilt the temple. But that glory of God, Hebrew word for it is Shekinah. The Shekinah glory of God, it didn't show up again. You can actually see this in...

There's a story in the book of Ezra about the laying down at the foundation of the second temple. Next slide. It says, At the laying of the foundation of the second temple, quote, Many of the older priests and Levites who had seen the first temple wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this one.

This is classic... Sorry, folks. This is classic old people behavior of like, gosh, this is not nearly as good as... They don't build them like they used to, do they? That is what's happening.

A new temple is being built. And as it's being built, every other story in scripture about the tabernacle being built, about the first temple being dedicated with Solomon, there's a story about the glory of God falling down, the Shekinah glory coming and residing in the temple.

Makes Moses' face glow. It makes all the priests fall down. This temple is rebuilt. And the old folks are like, yeah, big whoop. The Shekinah doesn't return.

[24 : 18] The glory doesn't come back. And so the prophets of that era start writing about, it's like the exile is still going. We're back in our place. The temple is rebuilt. And yet we're still waiting for deliverance.

And this is where all the messianic expectation is sitting. We are hoping that the Messiah will come. The anointed woman will come. The Christ will come and make the exile actually end.

Take up God's place in the temple. Reside in the temple. And God's glory will return. And finally, at last, the exile will end. And the way that the prophets spoke about this was in two different ways.

They gave it new exodus language, as if the exodus were going to happen again. And they gave it the language of the forgiveness of sins. The way that you knew that the exile had ended was when the Christ or the Messiah or the anointed one had come.

And that would bring about the forgiveness of sins. Now, this is a much, much larger phrase and word now than the reduced phrase that perhaps we're used to of, you've been made right with God.

[25 : 23] The prophets' way, the prophetic way of speaking about the forgiveness of sins was about the entire world being changed. About the entire world being brought back pre-curse, pre-everything going to hell, everything going badly.

That was how the prophets spoke about new exodus and the forgiveness of sins. So, here's Isaiah chapter 40. Some called this second Isaiah.

And around the 6th century BCE, second Isaiah writes this. He says, Comfort my people, says your God. Speak compassionately to Jerusalem and proclaim that her compulsory service, their slavery language, okay, so exodus language, has ended.

Clear the way in the desert. Clear the way in the wilderness. Make level a highway in the wilderness for our God. For the Lord's glory will appear. And listen, all humanity, so not just Israelites, not just Jews, all humanity will see it together.

This was the prophetic expectation. So, you've got exodus language, compulsory service, making a way in the desert, in the wilderness. Then the Lord's glory will appear and all humanity will see it together.

[26 : 38] Jeremiah puts it like this. The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. And it won't be like the covenant I made with their ancestors. I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.

I will put instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. And they will no longer need to teach each other to say, know the Lord. But they will all know me.

From the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. But four, listen, I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sins. And there's lots of examples we could go through of whenever you see forgiveness of sin language in the Hebrew Bible, it's connected to new exodus, new creation, all of the world being changed by this forgiveness.

It's not just about you and your personal relationship with Jesus being made right. It's about the world being made right. Again, N.T. Wright. We should know what this all means.

Modern Christians need to be reminded regularly that Jews in this period did not perceive themselves to be living within a story of an angry, moralistic God who threatened people that he would send them to hell if they displeased him.

[27 : 53] Nor were they hoping that if somehow they could make things all right, they would go to a place called heaven and be with God forever. Some ancient pagans thought that. Most ancient Jews did not.

They were hoping and longing and praying for what the prophets had sketched, what the Psalms had sung, what the ancient promises to the patriarchs had held out in prospect. Not rescue from this present world, but rescue and renewal within the present world.

The forgiveness of sins was a huge, life-changing, world-changing reality, long promised and long awaited. It was the fulfillment of Israel's hopes for resurrection, coupled with the sense that when Israel was restored, this would somehow generate a new day for the whole human race.

It is startling to reflect on just how diminished the average modern Western Christian vision of hope, of inheritance, of indeed forgiveness itself has become.

We exchanged the glory of God for a mess of spiritualized, individualistic, and moralistic pottage. So what we're trying to get at over these next few weeks is that we've talked about Exodus in preparation for Easter because the Exodus story is the story that God intends for all people everywhere.

[29 : 18] Yes, you individually, not discounting that, but not only you individually, but for the whole of creation. And so this resets and reframes the Jesus story about what Jesus was up to.

Is it about an angry God who's ready to smite you unless Jesus gets in the way? Or is it about God, God's self, appearing in the person of Jesus, showing us what love embodied looks like, and starting a revolution of new creation that we then follow in the footsteps of?

Those are two very different stories. Very different stories. One sets us on a path of always needing to make sure that we're pleasing God, always making sure that we don't get out from underneath the shadow of Jesus lest God smite us.

Or the other story is about a God who is always intending good for creation, always working for reconciliation for all people, and that it's not that we have to make sure that we don't mess up lest God kill us, but rather we're joining in the work that God is already doing.

This reframes the cross, not as a place where God somehow pours out his wrath and his violence against Jesus, but rather God taking on the violence that humanity has given him.

[30 : 34] Two very different stories. Final point before I wrap up. The word sin, yes, can mean those mistakes or flaws that we make towards each other or towards God.

But the word sin also has a different meaning in Scripture, and it has to do with those powers that we spoke about a few weeks ago, that there are these invisible forces that somehow define ourselves and the structures of the world.

In modern language, we use words like corporate culture or systems of oppression. Biblical language for that are the powers. And when Jesus is confronting the powers, one of the powers that Jesus confronts is the power of sin.

Sin, we are often taught, I have often been taught, is this individualistic thing that I did to break relationship with God. But in Scripture's imagination, sin is not about me.

Sin is this invasive power that's trying to sow chaos, oppression, and destruction into the world that sometimes we are unwitting participants in, but oftentimes is doing its own thing.

[31 : 47] And despite our best efforts, still seems to keep winning. And so God's move is to enter into the world, and by confronting death and sin, the powers of death and sin head on breaks.

This is the difference between a Band-Aid and resetting the bone. When we, our gospel is reduced merely to my individual behavior, I'm just sticking Band-Aids on.

But if my gospel is about the power of God breaking the power of death, darkness, and sin, the bone is reset, and healing can actually begin. So that is laying the framework for the next few weeks.

We'll continue in these ideas, and I hope you join us. Would you pray with me? A good, gracious, and almighty God, we thank you that your good news is better and larger and more grand than perhaps we've been told.

God, I pray that you would grant us the faith to actually believe it, to not be constricted by poor ideas about you and your anger and your wrath, but rather that our imaginations would be opened wide by your love and your work to break the bonds of sin, darkness, oppression, evil, and death for all people everywhere.

[33 : 10] God, I pray that we would be empowered by your spirit, which you say we are the temple of, we are the dwelling place of. I pray that we would be empowered by that spirit, God, to join you in your work of renewal, to join you in the places where you are already breaking life into dark and dead places.

God, would we have the eyes to see it in the places that we don't expect, in the places where we've been told not to look, God, I fully expect that that's where you are at work. God, may we trust and believe in that good news, in that gospel.

God, may our gospel of forgiveness of sins, may it, yes, include me, but God, may it grow to include all.

We pray these things in the powerful name of Jesus, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.