

"Greater Love Has NO One!" Rev. Kris Lyn Borns
Isaiah 52:13-53:12, John 17:1-8, Matthew 27:45-50
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I love the story of the Sunday school teacher who had her 6 year old students assembled in a semi-circle in front of her, all smiles and filled with great enthusiasm. The teacher asked, "What is grey, furry and has a bushy tail?"

The lil' kids thought for a few moments and then Spirit-filled lil' Jeremy shoots his hand in the air. "I know, I know!"

"You do, Jeremy? What is it?"

"Well," Jeremy began, "It sounds a lot like a squirrel, but I think the answer must be Jesus!" I think the answer must be Jesus!

Seriously, in Mark's Gospel (8:29), Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you think I am?" And that very question has been asked of every generation down through twenty plus centuries of human history.

And so, today I ask it of you, "Who is this Jesus Christ?" And why is it important to know? We live in an age of religious pluralism and moral relativism. Sadly, the popular spiritual philosophy is that all religious belief systems, as long as they are heartfelt, are equal. So, just pick one and follow it sincerely, and you'll be okay. That's what the world believes, that is what the world teaches! But Jesus teaches otherwise. So let's look briefly at who Jesus is by first looking at some of the questions frequently asked about him.

Who is Jesus, the One who died for us? He was 100% man. According to John 1:14, "*Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*" So...why is his humanity so important? In Hebrews 4:15 we read that "*Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are.*" Jesus can sympathize/empathize with our weaknesses as humans.

That is important to me! Jesus came to earth in human form so that he could die a physical death and take away our sins. Just imagine, if you can, how we would all be affected if we had no potential for escape from our sins!!! Jesus is the very key to membership in God's family. When he stooped to

our level by becoming man, he made it possible for us to relate to him and for God to relate to us through him!

Who is Jesus? He was 100% God! How was it possible that Christ's human body held the whole deity and glory of God? Well, according to John's Gospel (1:1-3) it says that Jesus existed from the beginning. We read, "*From the beginning, Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God.*" So the Bible establishes the inseparable nature of Jesus and the God of the universe. Consider, if you will, the **true highlights** of Christ's time is earth:

Consider the Many Miracles of Jesus: We read in Luke 7:22 "*Go and tell John the Baptist what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.*" My friends, only Jesus is capable of such miracles!

Consider Jesus' own identification...his own claim: Speaking to his disciples, "*Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.'*" (Luke 24:44-47)

And then, of course, the greatest miracle of all... The Resurrection from the dead: We read in Luke 24:39, "*Look at my hands and my feet, see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*"

Indeed, Jesus is the very key to membership in God's family. When he established his deity by rising from the grave, he made it possible for us to have forgiveness from sin *and* a renewed relationship with our God.

Who is Jesus? He is the way to Heaven. In John's Gospel we read as Jesus declares, "*I am the way and the **truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (14:6). Why is it

important to know that no other religious leaders throughout history have ever made these claims?

Recall with me those familiar words from Ephesians 2:8-9, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of **God - not by works**, so that no one can boast.*" Or one of my very favorite verses in Acts 4:12, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" **Jesus** is the way and the truth and the life! Period!

I can vividly recall one of my seminary professors repeatedly reminding his students that "every Sunday should be "a little Easter." Every Sunday should be a little Easter. Each time we gather to worship, we should do so in a spirit of celebration of Christ's Resurrection!

For the past months we have been focusing on meeting Christ in many settings throughout the scriptures. Last Sunday, Pastor Warren led us through a meditation of Christ's beating and flogging just prior to his death on the Cross. We focused on the awful abuse he endured on our behalf.

This morning we gather to focus on Christ's death. Today it is a little "Good Friday." It is a time to really concentrate and meditate on Jesus Christ giving the ultimate sacrifice for us...giving his very life for us...for you and for me!

Let me ask you a question before we continue our meditation this evening/morning. The question is this, "Who would you die to save? Your child? Your spouse? Your parent? Your sibling? How about a stranger? Who would you die to save? I want you to ponder that question while we meditate together but try to keep your attention with me as well. We will get back to that question, I promise!

True life story...a middle-aged man residing in a nursing home is currently paralyzed from the waist down and confined to bed most of the time. The man, now a recovering alcoholic, lived a rough past. He was prone to being involved in confrontations of all sorts, experienced two failed marriages, was living far apart from Christ, and, as he would put it, was on a one-way path to self-destruction. And then came the day when he hit rock-bottom. The man got down on his knees and prayed, "Whatever it takes, Lord, *slow me down*." Shortly thereafter came the accident at work that left him partially

paralyzed. Several days later he was stricken by multiple blood clots in his left lung which nearly took his life. As he lay there dying, he recalls crying out to God in deep desperation, "Lord, please help me." And just like that, he says, the pain miraculously disappeared, his breathing returned to normal, and his entire life gradually changed for the better...all because, as he says, he totally surrendered his life to Jesus. Now, when I say his life changed for the better, I need to qualify that. Because the reality is that since then, he's been in the hospital twenty times, experienced multiple surgeries, and now resides in a nursing home. But...he will tell you that today he genuinely feels more peace in his life than he ever has before!

Now, perhaps you are thinking to yourself, "What exactly does that story have to do with Christ's death on the cross?" If you were to visit with this man, he would be swift to tell you that when he became a Christian there was one thought, one picture that he couldn't get out of his mind. And it was the picture of what Jesus saw from the cross when he hung there those *six, long, agonizing hours*. I find that intriguing because ordinarily, we have a tendency to look *at* Jesus through the eyes of the penitent thief or from the perspective of the Roman centurion or even the mocking multitudes.

Last Sunday we considered what Jesus may have been feeling as he endured the excruciating, relentless beatings. This evening/morning, I invite us to consider what Jesus may have seen as he looked down from that old rugged cross. What was his perspective?

The first group Jesus saw from his vantage point consisted of his executioners - Roman soldiers whose job it was to affix him and the other two criminals to their respective crosses and then preside over this gruesome event until its desired goal had been achieved. As they went about their business, the very first words from Jesus' mouth must have totally stunned them! For rather than cursing them in anger, as they were no doubt most accustomed to, words of forgiveness flowed from the swollen and bloodied lips of Jesus. Those profound, gentle words we recall our Savior speaking, "*Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:24).

But did the executioners really know what they were doing? I suppose in one sense they did.

They had been ordered to carry out the crucifixion of these three criminals and they were simply following orders. But in another sense, no, I'm convinced they didn't know what they were doing. They didn't know that they were putting to death the *one and only* perfect man ever to live. They didn't know that they were crucifying their Creator. They didn't know that they were killing their sin-bearing Substitute. And because they didn't know that, they missed the greatest opportunity that had ever come their way - the opportunity to be delivered from the damning and eternal consequences of their sins...the opportunity to live in the glorious presence of God forever.

And sadly, I believe that describes many people in our world today, many of whom you and I might know very well. They are folks who, like those soldiers, go through the motions of life with no regard for the unbelievable sacrifice Christ made for them...living each day of their empty lives completely ignorant of the One who took upon himself their sins - no regard for the very One who died to save them from an eternity spent absent from the assurance of eternity spent in heaven with Christ.

The second group Jesus saw as he hung on the cross was perhaps the most obvious and definitely the most numerous, namely, the uncaring multitudes...those noisy throngs who had absolutely no regard for this human life. During those painful, pain-filled six hours that Jesus hung from the cross, hosts of people would have passed by. Sure, some out of curiosity - certainly some out of a sick sense of satisfaction to see Jesus getting what they felt he deserved, but most, surprisingly, out of necessity.

Because remember, this was Passover week in Jerusalem and thousands of people were streaming in and out of the city on a daily basis to observe this important festival. Many of those people were like the soldiers, completely ignorant of who Jesus was and actually indifferent to what was actually transpiring there that day.

But then there were those who were just downright cruel. The words from our Gospel tell us that these people hurled insults at Jesus and scoffed at previous claims he had made. Talk about kicking a guy when he's down! That's exactly what they were doing! And that's what we sometimes do as well when we "skip" church for the flimsiest of excuses, when we allow our Bibles to gather dust and go

unused, when we are indifferent to the spiritual needs of those around us, when we fail to give Jesus the place of honor and preeminence in our lives that he so justly deserves!

As we continue to look through the eyes of Jesus this evening/morning, we see the one sight that must have broken his heart more than anything else. We see his mother Mary, weeping at the foot of the cross barely able to lift her eyes and gaze upon the bloodied and disfigured countenance of her precious Son.

Surely Mary's mind must have gone back decades before to the time when she and Joseph had brought their eight day-old son to the temple (Luke 2:21-35). An elderly man named Simeon had appeared out of the shadows with perhaps a hint of a smile on his face. Simeon had told Mary and Joseph that he had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he himself would not face death until he beheld the promised Messiah. And almost instantly the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that Jesus truly was that Messiah. And then we learn that Simeon proclaimed his readiness to die for the promise had been fulfilled. He had met the Messiah!

But Simeon added something else very interesting on that occasion. Turning to Mary, he spoke these mysterious words that she no doubt must have pondered over and over again in her mind: *“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. This child is to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too”* (Lk. 2:34-35).

Mary must have felt the pain of that proverbial sword now as she finally comprehended, finally understood, what Simeon no doubt meant by those words. And there, along with Jesus' mother, we are told in the Gospel that *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* was also present at the foot of the cross (John 19:26-27). This, of course, we know was John.

And that automatically poses a question for us: Where were the other disciples? Where was Peter who had boasted the night before that he would be willing to go to prison for Jesus and even die for him if that became necessary (Luke 22:33).

And, where was Thomas, who at one time had said to his fellow disciples, “*Let us also go, that we may die with him*” (John 11:16). These words Thomas spoke when Jesus was contemplating going to Jerusalem, knowing full well the danger that awaited him there. Where was Thomas?

Where were Matthew, Philip, Bartholomew, Andrew, and the rest? Though we're not told for sure, my guess would be that they were in the same place we find them on Easter evening - in an upper room, hiding behind locked doors, scared to death that the Jews might try to do the same thing to them as they'd done to Christ.

And, can you begin to imagine how it must have hurt Jesus that his closest companions, in whom he had invested so much of himself, didn't have the courage to show up and offer him support. But, on the other hand, imagine oh, how it must have warmed his heart to see the familiar tear streaked face of John standing there looking up at him!

This evening/morning, I think we must all take stock and ask ourselves, "Which of those two do I most resemble? Where would I have been? With the fearful disciples who failed to show up, or with the beloved John who would be there for his Lord even when everyone else deserted him?"

St. Matthew records in his Gospel, chapter 27, verses 45-50 (to be read by Pastor), so "*from the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' - which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*"

Forsaken by his closest companions, rejected by the Jewish religious leaders, mocked and vilified by the uncaring multitudes, Jesus now experiences the greatest rejection of all as he beholds a sight that only he could see from the cross. He sees his own heavenly Father turning away from him and basically subjecting him to the horrors and agonies of hell.

In her book, *Just Like Jesus*, Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of the late Billy Graham, describes what was actually happening at this point of Jesus Passion. She writes: “For the first time in eternity, the Father and Son were actually separated. They were separated by all of your sins and my sins, which

came between them. And Jesus, suffocating physically, was smothered spiritually by a blanket of loneliness such as he had never known."

Why would the Father do that to his only Son? Simply because at that point Jesus Christ was shrouded in and burdened with all the sins that had ever been committed and all the sins that ever would be committed. From the Father's perspective it was a sight that was so disgusting, so detestable, so abhorrent that he couldn't bear to look upon his Son. So the Father forsook him and punished him, ALL so that you and I would never have to know what that is like!

Did we deserve that? Did you and I deserve that? Absolutely not! But Christ paid the debt he didn't owe, because we owed a debt we couldn't pay! And that, my good friends, is why we call it *grace... amazing grace!*

What a comfort it is to know that while Jesus was on the cross, you were on his mind. We all were on his mind. Clearly he was willing to give his life for strangers he had not yet met. Giving his ALL for your sake and mine! Beaten, bloodied, taking his final breath while nailed to an old rugged cross...all for you...all for me!

Jesus on the cross is God being our best friend.

Jesus on the cross is God putting himself in front of anything and everything. So in that week we call "Holy," and every other week, even if it's hell and horror, we might find the holy, we might find the "good," and say with the apostle Paul, as he wrote to the church in Rome, "*I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 8:38-39). **NOT EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS!**

A very good friend of mine recently shared an incident which occurred with her four-year-old grandson. She has granted me permission to share it with you. Little Eli hopped up onto his Grammy's lap and looked deep into her eyes with his big blue eyes. He looked so deeply, so intensely that Grammy felt as though his eyes reached into her very soul. And then, little Eli put his chubby hands on

Grammy's shoulders and said as soberly as any judge, "Grammy, do you know Jesus?"

Overwhelmed, but elated by the four-year-old's question, my friend was thrilled to answer back, "Yes, dear, I do know Jesus. What do you want to know about Him?" And then, with all the ecstasy a little four-year-old can muster, he said, "Oh, I already know all about him, Grammy. I was just curious, because now I know you can go to heaven with me!" And then after a tremendous hug that spoke volumes, Eli was happily on his way out to play.

Ah, the simple, yet profound faith of an innocent child! Who, in your life, do you need to ask the question little Eli posed? Who do you want to know beyond the shadow of a doubt will be with you in heaven?

Oh, remember that question? Who would you give up your life for...for whom would you die?

It is so far from my own comprehension when I attempt to imagine what my Savior endured, to spare me the suffering and assure me eternal life with him in heaven!

TRULY... Greater love has NO ONE than the love Christ Jesus demonstrated for you and for me. Undeserved, unmerited grace given to you and to me! TRULY...an unequalled gift that only our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ could give! All thanks and praise for his unspeakable gift! Amen.