
THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

Today I will tell the "Greatest Story Ever Told."

- I do not claim I will tell it the best it was ever told.
- The apostles did that – I assure you.
- Yet I will tell it as best I can – because it needs to be told.

I will begin the story with the words of Isaiah:

Isaiah 53:1-3

1 Who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.
3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

At the time Jesus was on earth, not even His apostles fully appreciated Him. But when John became an old man he would write these words:

John 1:14

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory,
the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

No greater subject could we consider and no grander story could we tell. The apostle wrote:

1 Corinthians 2:2

2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

John 3:16

16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

No passage is more comprehensive than this. The whole gospel story is summarized in these few words. In fact it is briefly summarized in one word: **LOVE**.

- a) *God **loved** the world.*
- b) *God **so loved** the world – to the extent that He gave His Son.*
- c) *His only begotten Son (uniquely begotten)*
- d) *To redeem the world.*

What was wrong with the world that God paid such a price for its redemption?

- e) *It was perishing.*

In order that it might not perish God gave His Son:

- f) *That whosoever believes in Him (not just everyone) should not perish.*

In this text we see two sides:

- **God** – a loving God; a giving God.
- **A world** – a perishing world; a receiving world.

A MISCONCEPTION OF GOD

There is a misconception of God. Satan has convinced some that God hates them and wants to damn them.

Some see God as a beast who lurks in the shadows – longing for an opportunity to pounce upon them and rend them limb from limb.

Listen: It's the Devil who is *"a roaring lion, walking about, seeking who he may devour"* (1 Pet 5:8).

Some see God as One seeking to seize man by the neck and sling him off into an eternal hell and then forever gloat like a fiend over man's miseries.

A more distorted view of God would not be possible. Satan never perpetrated a greater deception on the human family than when he succeeded in painting that picture of God.

The Bible pictures God as a loving Father, *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet 3:9).

Psalms 103:8-14

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
9 He will not always strive with us,
Nor will He keep His anger forever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
13 As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.
14 For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.

The OT is full of such passages. But it is in the NT that God's redeeming love is fully revealed. It is there that the gift of His love is given.

We cannot over-emphasize His love. We need to stress it – make it the central point around which all other points revolve.

Poets have tried to write of God's love and have merely expressed their inability to describe it.

F. M. Lehman wrote:

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

*Oh love of God, how rich and pure
How measureless and strong;
It shall forevermore endure,
The saints and angels' song.*

(via, Sacred Selections, edited by Ellis J. Crum, Song #267)

TWO IMMEASURABLE THINGS

There are at least two things that man has not been able to measure:

- **God's love**
- **Man's sin**

We get an idea of the vastness of both when we see what God did to save man from sin. He sacrificed His only begotten Son for us.

Why did Christ have to die?

THE PURPOSE OF JESUS' DEATH

Sin is a transgression of God's law (1 Jn 3:4).

With every law there is a penalty for breaking that law – otherwise the law becomes a mockery. God's law carried with it the most severe punishment because it was the most majestic law.

Q: Why? Why did His law carry such a punishment?

A: Because He is pure – He is *"light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1 Jn 1:5). This is who God is! He cannot have any part with sin.

Since man was a sinner (lawbreaker) divine justice demanded that the penalty be paid. The penalty **MUST** be paid.

So God found Himself in a dilemma (so to speak):

- On the one hand He **MUST** punish the sinner.
- On the other hand, He **LOVES** the sinner and does not want the sinner to perish.

Q: How did God solve this dilemma?

A: Jesus was the answer. He came to pay the penalty for us. Since He had no sin of His own (1 Pet 2:22) His death was on behalf of fallen mankind.

ILL: It's like a hospital to which you owe money. They don't care who pays the bill ... **JUST AS LONG AS THE BILL GETS PAID!**

Likewise, God did not care who paid the price for sin, just as long as it got paid.

Jesus paid the price.

1 Peter 3:18

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, **the just for the unjust**, that He might bring us to God, ...

All the lambs that died on Israel's altars, all the bleeding sacrifices offered on the hills of Zion could not forgive one sin.

All the wealth of the world could not purchase salvation for one soul.

Hebrews 9:22

22 ... without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Hebrews 10:1-4

1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.

2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

4 For **it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.**

God robbed heaven of its richest jewel; He plucked the fairest flower that blossomed in the paradise of God and sent His own Son (Jesus) to pay that price.

WHY DID CHRIST SUFFER?

Acts 17:2-3

2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

3 explaining and demonstrating that the **Christ had to suffer** ...

Q: Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer? Surely Jesus could have died for mankind in a more humane way couldn't He?

There are at least three reasons for the Lord's suffering:

1) To satisfy the justice for sin.

When a violent criminal is humanely executed, some are still not satisfied. They believe a violent criminal should die a violent death.

Jesus satisfied the justice for sin.

1 John 2:2

2 And He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

propitiation – appeasement, conciliation, satisfaction.

No one can honestly look at Jesus and say, *"I'm not satisfied that justice was paid."*

2) An example for mankind.

Jesus' death gives us some idea of our own fate if we reject God. His execution was public to teach others a lesson lest they someday be lost in hell themselves.

The cruel death of Jesus shows God's hatred for sin. If we reject Christ, we deserve hell.

Hebrews 2:3

3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

3) To understand our human point of view.

Hebrews 2:18

18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, **He is able to aid those who are tempted.**

Hebrews 4:15

15 For we do not have a **High Priest** who cannot **sympathize with our weaknesses**, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 5:8-9

8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience **by the things which He suffered.**

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

If you think you have sufferings and trials, just think about Jesus. He is able to sympathize with you.

No one ever suffered like Him!

HOW DID CHRIST SUFFER?

Our minds wonder back 2000 years to the time when the Savior was born in Bethlehem.

"THIS LITTLE CHILD"

*Who would have thought that long ago
So very far away
A little child would be born
And in a manger lay?*

*And who would have thought this little child
Was born the King of kings'
The Son of just a carpenter,
But for whom the angels sing?*

*And who would have thought that as he grew
And with other children played,
This child with whom they laughed and sang
Would die for them some day?*

*And who would have thought this little child
Could make a blind man see?
Feed the hungry, make rich the poor,
And set the sinner free?*

Oh who would have thought this little child

*Was who the prophet said
Would take away the sins of man
And rise up from the dead?*

(Scott Wesley Brown, record album: "SWB")

When Christ was just a babe His mother Mary presented Him in the temple. An old man came:

Luke 2:34-35

34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against

35 (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Little did she realize what this would mean.

We do not see the full strength of God's love until we come to the dark hour of the cross.

GETHSEMANE

The night Jesus was betrayed He left the upper room and crossed the brook Kidron going into the Garden of Gethsemane.

Disciples stationed as sentinels on the way. Eight in one place, three in another – watching for the mob.

"My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."

Going further, Jesus prayed alone. Blood dripped from his face. (Recite prayer of Jesus)

Why didn't God hear that prayer? Was His heart stone? Ah, no, God did hear that prayer.

Psalms 22:24

24 For [God] has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of **The Afflicted**;
Nor has He hidden His face from Him;
But **when He cried to Him, He heard**.

Hebrews 5:7

7 ... in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications,
with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and
was heard because of His godly fear,

I've thought about what heaven must have been like the night Jesus prayed in the garden:

- That wailing cry from Gethsemane went up to heaven. Angels stopped their singing and stood at attention waiting for the Father's command.
- The Father, having been seated on the throne of the universe, stood up.
- He looks down and hears the cry of His Holy Child in the dust of the earth.
- His great chin quivers and tears begin to course down His face.
- He sees that senseless mob creeping up the hill like a beast stalking for its prey.

The cry of anguish pierces the heavens twice again and the angels weep. They don't understand (1 Pet 1:12).

Will the Father now save the Son?

- The Father looks again and he sees another scene. He looks out over the ages and sees millions of men as they stagger beneath the burden of sin. He hears them crying for mercy. He sees them standing by the open tomb with broken and bleeding hearts yearning for light.
- God must make a choice.
- He must either save Jesus or us.

We are here this morning to praise Him because He chose us!

It was not possible to remove the cup. ↓

(Read carefully)

Revelation 5

1 And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?"

3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

4 So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

7 Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll,

And to open its seals;

For You were slain,

And have redeemed us to God by Your blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

10 And have made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,

12 saying with a loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain

To receive power and riches and wisdom,

And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

"Blessing and honor and glory and power

Be to Him who sits on the throne,

And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

14 Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

Repeat: It was not possible to remove that cup.

An angel came to minister to the Lord.

Q: How does an angel minister to the Son of God? How does he do that?

The mob came and arrested the Lord.

Ivan Costa wrote:

*Come to the garden, oh, come with me:
Come there to see what we might see:
Jesus, the Lord, was there, you know.
There's where he went to pray alone.*

*Tear-drops do stain the garden floor;
What, oh, dear friend, are these tears for?
These are the tears of a threatened dove,
Left in the garden with wondrous love.*

*Blood-drops do mar the garden space;
Though He was whole, e'er He came this way;
This is the blood of a trusting Son,
Left in the garden with wondrous love.*

*See, now, the tear stains begin to fade;
Lo, too, the blood-drops have gone away;
Where is the love I cannot see?
Gone from the garden to die for me.*

(Ivan Costa, via Holy Manna, Lynwood Smith Publications, 1994, Song #186)

THE TRIAL

When Jesus stood before Caiaphas, it was **the last high priest** of God pointing at **the last sacrificial lamb** of God.

In Pilate's judgment hall, a mock trial was staged:

The Charge: Unknown

The Evidence: Invalid

The Witnesses: False

The Verdict: Innocent

The Sentence: Death by crucifixion

Scourging – preliminary to every crucifixion. Victims often died during this phase. They were beaten half to death.

Isalah 52:14 (RSV)

14 As many were astonished at him –
his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the sons of men.

Isalah 53:3-7

3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

Crown of thorns – according to Mark, after being placed on Jesus' head they beat Him in the head with reeds – driving the thorns into His head.

Jesus bore His own cross. The route was long so the populace could see the fate of the criminals and serve as examples.

The accusation sign was usually worn about the neck so people would know the crime which was committed.

THE CRUCIFIXION

Luke 23:33

33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

To make the shame of the cross more unbearable, the victim was usually robbed of all clothing (Klaas Schilder, Christ Crucified, 3:169). It was extremely shameful.

Thus, if Jesus was crucified in the normal way, he was stretched out on the cross naked!

Hebrews 12:2

2 [look] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, **despising the shame**, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Spikes were driven through His hands and feet to hold Him on the cross.

The sun was not allowed to shine upon this scene, so God darkened it at the noon hour.

An opiate-type drug of wine and myrrh was offered to dull the pain, but Jesus would not drink.

- No friends
- People spitting on Him
- Cursing at Him
- Laughing at Him
- Staring at Him

- Forsaken by God and friends

Jesus shouted out: **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

Stewart Townend:

*How deep the Father's love for us!
 How vast beyond all measure!
 That He should give His only Son
 To make a wretch His treasure!
 How great the pain of searing loss!
The Father turns His face away
 As wounds which mar the Chosen One
 Bring many sons to glory.*

*Behold the Man upon the cross,
My sin upon His shoulders,
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers;
 It was my sin that held Him there
 Until it was accomplished,
 His dying breath has brought me life;
 I know that it is finished.*

(Stuart Townend, How Deep The Father's Love; Abiding Hope, Kevin Presley, #1)

Shortly afterwards he shouted with a loud voice, bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.

Earth began to quake and rumble.

Vail in the temple ripped in half. (OT done away; NT came into force ⇒ **cup in communion**).

Mark 15:39

39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

Isalah 53:8-12

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,
 And who will declare His generation?
 For He was cut off from the land of the living;
 For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

9 And they made His grave with the wicked;
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.
10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.
11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.

Barrabas was meant for the middle cross. So were we.

Spear pierced his side and out flowed blood ⇒ **fruit of the vine.**

Blood and water separated. According to medical authorities this indicates a ruptured heart.
Jesus died of a broken heart!

THE RESURRECTION

If I ended the story here, it would not be the "Greatest Story Ever Told."

- It would be the saddest,
- But not the **greatest**.

The story ends with the Lord resurrecting from the dead:

Matthew 28:5-6

5 But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.

6 He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

If you think verb tenses do not matter, think again.

- This is past tense.
- *"See the place where the Lord had lain."* (ἔκειτο)

THE ASCENSION

The good news continues – for He not only arose from the dead, He ascended back into heaven:

Luke 24:50-51

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them.

51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.

Mark 16:19

19 ... He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

THE SECOND COMING

The good news ends with the declaration that He will come again one day:

Acts 1:9-11

9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

THIS is: ***"The Greatest Story Ever Told!"***

CONCLUSION

Sign:

One time I asked Jesus: "How much do You love me?" And He said, "This much," and He stretched out His arms and died.

Have you no room in your heart for a Savior like this?

- The sun refused to shine upon the crucifixion of Jesus. Can you look upon it without a blush?
- The earth trembled when the Savior died. Can you think about it without a tremor?
- The solid rocks were shivered. Can your heart remain unbroken?

Isaac Watts:

*See from His head, his hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine;
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

(Isaac Watts, "When I Survey The Cross," via, [Sacred Selections](#), op cit, Song #179)

THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What misconception of God has the Devil painted in the minds of men?
- 2) What two things have never been measured?
- 3) Why did Jesus have to die?
- 4) Why did He have to suffer before He died?
- 5) Why didn't God answer the prayer of Jesus when he prayed in Gethsemane?
- 6) What made crucifixion so shameful?