

Overcoming Evil by the Gospel

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Romans chapter 12. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible. Starting in verse 1, we read, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Then in verse 14, we read, Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

[1 : 10] Beloved, never avenge yourself, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is the word of God. Thank you, Celeste. Well, good morning once again. It was good to meet some of you, maybe for the first time, and some that haven't been back at Watermark for a while. It's great to have you with us again this morning. Now, we've been working through Romans chapter 12 for the last six weeks or so, and today is the last sermon in the series.

And next week we start a series called Gender, Sex, Relationships, and God. And we're going to be looking at all things in that category for four or five weeks. But today is our last series in Romans chapter 12.

[2 : 13] And one of the things that Romans 12 has been teaching us and showing us is that the gospel is not just something that should be theoretical.

It actually has real implications for our lives. One of the charges that I constantly hear and we constantly hear against Christianity is that sometimes people feel like Christianity, for all that it says and promises, doesn't seem to make that much difference in people's lives.

I mean, what difference does Jesus really make? Maybe you're here this morning and you're not a Christian. Maybe you're still on a spiritual journey. Maybe that's one of your questions. You think you look at those that claim to be followers of Jesus, you look at those that aren't Christians, and you say, I don't see any difference in their lives.

Their lives look the same. What difference does Jesus and the gospel actually make to the nitty-gritty realities of our lives? And one of the things that Romans 12 has been showing us is that the gospel has radical implications for the way that we live our lives.

And today, the passage is going to talk to us about how the central thesis of Christianity, that Jesus Christ came to earth in order to die for people like us, how that central thesis has real traction and relevance to some of the most painful and intimate and nitty-gritty areas of our lives.

[3 : 39] And that is how the gospel speaks to the areas of our lives when people treat us less than we'd want to be treated, when people are cruel or mean towards us, when people use and abuse us or sin against us.

And so the question that this passage asks us today is, how do we respond in these situations? All of us have encountered difficult people from time to time.

It could be a colleague that sabotages your deal in order to steal your client, right? It could be your boss that just shouts vitriolic things at you and tells you you're rubbish and you're useless and they

threaten to fire you all the time.

It could be a neighbor or family member, a sibling, a parent that belittles you. It could be a spouse. But all of us have had these encounters, and how do we respond to such situations?

Well, I think there's a couple of natural responses, right? The one way that we can respond is we respond like for like. We respond in kind. So someone slanders you and you think, you just wait, I'm going to get back at you, right?

[4 : 52] Somebody curses you and you curse them back. I remember a few years ago, I was reminded of this this week, when I lived in South Africa, I'm ashamed to say I was a pastor at this stage, and I had a colleague who I felt like he was pressurizing me into a corner, kind of forcing my hand, and I was getting a bit agitated.

And remember, he sent me an email, and I can still picture where I was on Seapoint Main Road. I wrote this email back. I said, if you're going to play hardball with me, buddy, I'm going to play just as hard back to you.

And that's how our hearts often want to respond, right? You like that to me? Just wait until I get back at you. That's a kind of very Western way of handling things.

Another way of handling things is we like to save face, right? So we nod our heads and say, yes, yes, it's all okay, it's all okay. But inside, we're seething with anger, right? So we nod our heads, but inside, we're thinking, stuff you.

I'm going to find a way to let you know who's boss. Well, I guess the third way is the way of passive-aggressive, right? We just become experts in just that look or dropping that comment or just in the boardroom setting.

[6 : 04] We just drop that very witty little line that lets everybody know how you feel without really attacking the person directly. And so all these ways of responding.

Well, our passage today tells us that there's another way. And it actually reveals to us the problem with all of these, and it shows us the beauty of another way.

And so look at what Paul says. Let's read it again together. Paul starts off, and remember, all this is under Romans 12, verse 1, where he says, Appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, by the kindness of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, in other words, all of life, holy and acceptable, pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. And then he says, remember, don't be conformed to the ways of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, by thinking new thoughts along the lines of the gospel.

Be transformed. And then look at what he says in verse 14. He says, bless those that persecute you. Bless them and do not curse them. Verse 17, repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all men.

[7 : 13] Verse 19, beloved, never avenge yourselves, but on the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. Paul hits us in the face, in the solar plexus, with this radical, shocking, counter-cultural, counter-intuitive idea.

Paul's saying that contrary to the way we want to handle these kind of situations, there's another way. And it's not what comes to any of us naturally, but it is the way of Christ and it's the way of the gospel.

Now, in the Bible, to bless somebody doesn't just mean to pat them on the back and say, bless you, brother, or say good morning to someone. In the scripture, to bless somebody is to invoke God's favor and blessing upon them.

It's to go before God in prayer on behalf of that person. To pray for God to rain down his favor and his blessing upon them. And that's what Paul says we should do.

Which is exactly, actually, if you remember, what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5, Jesus says, And that's what Paul says here.

[8 : 35] He says, And in verse 15, he actually goes further. And look at what he says in verse 15. He says, Martin O'Jones points out, It's easy to weep with those who weep.

Anyone that's got an ounce of compassion in their hearts. You hear of somebody that's suffering and you can extend some compassion to them. But to rejoice at somebody else's success, that takes a unique kind of humility.

But remember the context here. The verse before says, Bless those that curse you. Paul's not just talking about your family member or your friend. He's talking about the colleague that's out to get

you.

When hardship falls upon them, find some way to sympathize with the person that's out to curse you. When the colleague that's out to sabotage your deal, when they get promotion, find some way in your hearts to even be glad and rejoice with them.

Oh my goodness. Are you serious, Paul? Well, look at the final verse with me. Look at verse 21.

Verse 21 gives us a kind of summary statement of Paul's thinking.

[9 : 51] He says, Do not be overcome by evil, but rather overcome evil with good. When all this is going on, when you're being cursed and persecuted, when you're being sidelined and maligned, when others are fighting with you, when you're being unfairly treated and belittled, don't be overcome by evil, but find a way to overcome evil with good.

Now, the word overcome here is actually a military word. It's a word that's used for the army, and it's in the context of when a battle is raging, the one that overcomes is obviously the victim, the one that wins the battle.

And what Paul is saying here is that much of the Christian life is actually a battle. There's a battle that's going on in the Christian life. But the battle, Paul says, is not between myself and my colleague, or myself and my family member.

There's another kind of battle that's going on. The battle that Paul is talking about is not played out in the corridors of the workplace or the boardroom. It's played out in the contours of my own heart. You see that? And he's saying there's this battle, and whatever happens, make sure that you win this battle. In Genesis 4, God says the same thing.

[11 : 09] You might remember, it's a beautiful poetic language. Cain and Abel, the two sons of Adam and Eve, and Cain is angry with his brother. He's jealous of his brother, and he's angry with him.

And he's seething in his heart. And God comes to him and says, Cain, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is to overcome you, is for you.

But you must rule over it. He talks about sin as being this kind of crouching tiger that's just outside the door, and it's waiting for you to drop your guard.

It's licking its lips, and it's waiting to eat your life. But he says, but Cain, there's a way for you to be victorious over this thing. Don't let it rule over you.

You must rule over it. And that's the same thing that Paul says here. Don't be overcome by evil. Make sure that you overcome evil. What Paul is telling us here is that it's possible to win the argument, or to win the kind of tussle with your colleague, and yet lose the battle.

[12 : 15] It's possible that you think you've won the battle because you get back at them, and then you put that person in their place, but actually, you've lost the battle for your soul because you've become overcome by evil in the process.

It's kind of like, I'm sure many of us know this, if you have a disagreement with your spouse, right, and you and your spouse are, there's some argument that's going on, and let's say you are a lawyer, and you've got the gift of the gab, and you know how to argue, and you can argue your case, and you can out-argue your spouse, and you argue them into a corner, and you put them in their place, and you make them feel like it's all their fault, and you're the innocent victim, and you get them to pretty much, you argue them into a corner.

What's happened? You've won the argument, but you've lost the relationship, right? You might have won the argument, but actually, you've lost.

The way to win marital conflict is when you both come to the place where you say, hey, this sucks. I'm sorry. No, no, I'm sorry. Hey, let's reconcile.

That's what winning looks like, and that's the problem with the whole victim mentality of our day. When we feel victimized, when we feel like somebody else's evil entitles me to either act evilly, or to think evil thoughts in my mind, and think I'm justified because of their evil.

[13 : 45] But what happens is that we let evil win in the end. And as we all know, evil only begets more evil. Wickedness only gives birth to more wickedness. And so Paul's contention here is that the gospel gives us another way.

It's a way that not only allows us to not be overcome by evil, but actually to overcome it. And that is, he says, to pray for, to bless, to serve, to find a way to extend good to those that do wrong to us.

Now, there are hundreds of stories of this, and I heard one story this week, and it's a very old story, but it captures it so well. One of my heroes is a man by the name of Charles Spurgeon.

He lived 150 years ago. He was this preacher in London in the late 19th century. And he tells a story of, he led this wonderful church, but he also oversaw many organizations, orphanages, and many, many charities.

And there was, one of the organizations he was leading, there was a decision that he made, and there was another person that was convinced it was the wrong decision. And Spurgeon said, okay, I hear you out, but I'm still going to go with my decision.

[15:02] And this man was angry and furious. He said, you can't do that. That's wrong of you, and was very angry with him. And so this man said, if you go ahead with your decision, I'm going to write a pamphlet, I'm going to get it printed, and I'm going to expose you.

I'm going to distribute it all over London so that everyone will know what you're like. That's like the ancient version of writing a blog post. They didn't have blogs in those days. So he said, I'm going to write this thing, I'm going to expose you, and everyone's going to know about it.

And Spurgeon says, really? He says, that's going to cost you a lot of money. You really want to pay for the printing and then pay for someone to distribute it? And then he said, I don't care what it costs, I'm going to do it.

So Spurgeon said, I'll tell you what, I'll pay for the printing. And then he said, and if the story becomes a sensation and you're able to sell it, sell it to newspapers and make some money from it, you keep all the profit.

And Spurgeon ends the story saying like this, he says, I never heard any more about that pamphlet, and that man is now an exceedingly good friend of mine, and I hope he always will remain so.

[16:12] You see what happened? It wasn't just that he got his way and the pamphlet died, you know, fell in the wayside. That's one part of the story. But actually, it wasn't just that he wasn't overcome.

He overcame this and was able to establish reconciliation. The man who was once his enemy actually became his friend. To repay evil with evil, whether in thought or in action, is actually to be overcome by evil.

But on the other hand, to repay evil with good is to overcome it and to defeat it. Now, in this passage, Paul's going to give us a couple of other reasons why this is good.

And so let's look at those reasons. I want to give us three reasons, extra motivations, for why this is the way of the Christian. If you follow Jesus this morning, why God calls us this radical, counterintuitive, countercultural way of life.

And the first reason is this. Because God alone is supremely faithful and perfectly just. God alone is supremely faithful and perfectly just.

[17:21] One of the reasons why I think we are so tempted when somebody belittles us or maligns us or treats us wrongly, one of the reasons why I think we're so tempted to hit back at them or to repay kind for kind is because often we think if I don't do it, who's going to do it?

Right? It's not like you can call the police when your colleague sends you a nasty email. Right? It's like, if I don't do something about it, I'm just going to be trampled on. Who's going to ever put this thing right?

There's a sense of injustice in our hearts that feels like this thing is not right and somebody's got to stand up for this. But look at what Paul says in verse 19 in our passage. Paul says, let's read it together.

He says, beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. Now, what does Paul mean here?

What's he saying? Is Paul saying, listen, don't take matters into your own hands because you're just small potato, right? Leave it to God. He'll bring in the big guns and then he'll really nuke the guy.

[18:28] You know, right? Is that what he's saying? No, that's not really what Paul's saying. What Paul is saying here is he's saying that when we take matters into our own hands, because we ourselves are fallen and we are finite, we don't have perfect perspective, the chances are we're going to just perpetuate evil as much as evil has been done to us.

Because we don't have perfect perspective, we don't know the whole story, we're not perfectly just, our own hearts are deceptive and broken and crooked, chances are that we're going to do evil back and then the cycle just continues.

And Paul is saying that we tend to perpetuate evil rather than bringing about justice. I think that's the point of verse 16 and 17. Look at what he says here. He says, don't be haughty.

In other words, don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to. Never be wise in your own sight. The problem with pride is that it blinds us to who we really are.

It blinds us to reality and it blinds us to handling things well. Miroslav Wulf says this. He says, forgiveness flounders, in other words, it doesn't flourish because when I exclude my enemy from the community of humans and I exclude myself from the community of sinners.

[19 : 49] See what he's saying there? When there's somebody that's out to get me, I think of this person as less than human and I somehow think of myself as more than everyone else.

I've got perfect perspective. They're all sinners but I know how to handle the situation. And Paul's contention here is that there is one who has perfect perspective.

There is one who sees down deep into the reality of the human heart and he sees perfectly. And there is one who is perfectly just. And he is faithful.

And you can leave it in his hands and you can trust that he will handle it perfectly. His justice is never thwarted. His justice is never too harsh or too soft.

God's justice and God's mercy are not mutually exclusive but they are perfectly married together. When we take things into our own hands, we are sometimes too harsh, other times too soft.

[20 : 47] But God knows how to handle things perfectly. Friends, when humanity has tried to play God, it always ends disastrously.

Let God be God. Let you be you and leave matters in his hands. Your life, friends, is not in your hands. Do you know that your life is in God's hands? Do you know, friends, that there is not a single door that God wants to open that anyone can shut.

And if God wants to shut the door, there is no one that can open it. Your life is in his hands. Commit your ways to the Lord. He will look after your steps. And the problem is when we try and take things in our own hands, we tend to mess it up.

Friends, for those of us that are parents, can I urge us, let's teach our children this, that their life is not in their hands. They don't need to hustle their way through life to get to the top. Those who get to the top still don't necessarily win.

Jesus said, you can own the whole world and yet still lose your soul. So friends, let's teach our children, let's teach our own hearts. There is a God in heaven. He really does hear the cry of every broken heart.

[21 : 55] He really is supremely faithful. He really is sovereignly majestic. He really is perfectly just. Okay?

So first reason, God is supremely faithful and he's perfectly just. Second reason is this, because blessing those who curse is always, or did not say always, is usually redemptive.

Redemptive. Look at verse 20 with me. Verse 19, Paul says, beloved, never avenge yourselves, leave it to God. Verse 20, to the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head. Now here again, we have the same situation. What's going on here? Is Paul saying, listen, you know, when someone's unkind to you, you be kind back to them and you'll cause fire and brimstone to fall out on them, right?

Fire, thunder and lightning to fall on the head and to smite them dead. No, that's not what Paul is saying at all. What he's saying here is that when we respond with kindness to cruelty, there should be some kind of, the hope is that that arrests the person and causes them to sit up and think, what's going on here?

[23 : 15] It should arrest their action and cause them to stop doing what they're doing and to give thought to their actions. If you ever have a burning coal on you or an ember from a fire on you, let's say you're barbecuing and you stoke the fire and the sparks fly and embers fly out and an ember lands on you, you don't just carry on doing what you're doing, talking to your mate, right?

You quickly stop and you stop doing what you're doing. Paul is saying the same thing. When we respond with kindness to cruelty, that should cause like a knife wound, a stabbing, to say, hey, what's going on here?

And to cause the person to stop and reflect and possibly to redeem the situation or the relationship. One of the greatest stories, examples of this is a fictional story, but it's awesome.

I don't know if you guys know the story of Les Miserables. Anyone know that story? If you don't know the story, it's one of the greatest stories in Western literature the last 500 years, written by Victor Hugo, this French guy, and set in, I think, 17th or 18th century France.

And so the story of this guy called Jean Valjean, and he doesn't have a whole lot of money, and one day he steals a loaf of bread, and he's caught, and he's sentenced to 12 years in prison.

[24 : 32] And he tries to escape a few times, so he delays it, delays it, eventually 19 years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread. And he's eventually released from prison, but he's branded a criminal forever, he's got to report to his parole officer all the time, he can't get a job, there's no jobs in France, he can't find anything to eat, and the whole system is stacked against him.

And so life just goes from bad to worse, and eventually one day he's sleeping on the street outside of a church, and he hasn't had anything to eat in days, his clothes are torn, and the vicar of the church, the priest, sees him outside there, and he says, listen, you can't sleep here, come on inside. And he gives him some new clothes, and he gives him a hot warm meal, first good meal he's had in days, and he gives him a bed to sleep on, and he says, listen, sleep here tonight, and tomorrow we'll fix you up on your way.

And so he comes in, and he's tatty, and he's ragged, but while he's eating this meal, his eyes fall upon all the silverware in the dining room of the church house, right?

And all the cutlery is this amazing polished silver, and he's thinking to himself, these guys have got more money than I've seen in my entire lifetime. And so later that night, the priest goes to bed, the house is quiet, and Jean Valjean, and he gets up, and he goes downstairs, and he steals all the silverware, puts in his bag, and he flees into the night, and he runs away.

[26 : 03] But he doesn't get very far before he's found. And some police officers catch him, and they see he's looking a bit scraggy, and they look inside his bag, and there's all the silverware, and I don't know if it's stamped with the church, you know, emblem or something, and they realize what's happened, and so they take him back to the church.

And so in the early hours of the morning, they knock on the church door, and they say, Vicar, look what we found, this man with all your silverware, and he claims that you gave it to him as a gift, but we've returned him to you along with your silver.

And the priest looks at Jean Valjean, and he says, Jean Valjean, what have you done? He says, you left these behind, and he goes back into the church, and he gets these two massive silver candlesticks, and he says, here you are, you left in such a hurry, you must have forgotten, I gave these to you as well.

And he puts them in his hands, and he says to the police officer, release this man, this is my gift to him. And the officers look at each other, they don't know what's going on, they can't believe it, they know what's going on, but they can't believe it, and they trunnel from the dark, and the priest turns to Jean Valjean, and he says this, he says, you must use the silver to become an honest man. God has raised you out of darkness, I have redeemed your soul for God. And this act of kindness releases this firestorm of an explosion in Jean Valjean's heart.

[27 : 32] He doesn't know what to do, he's this bitter, angry, scoundrel, thieving man who's hated the world, and suddenly this act of kindness blows his world apart, and it completely transforms him, and revolutionizes his life into a whole new man.

Listen to what he says, this is from the play, he says, I had come to hate the world, this world that always hated me, take an eye for an eye, turn your heart into stone, that's all I've ever lived for, that's all I've ever known, and one word from that man, the priest, and I would have been back, beneath the lash, my hands upon the rack, instead, he's offered me my freedom, I feel my shame inside me like a knife, he's talking about the coals on his head, right, and he goes on to say, Jean Valjean is dead, a new life has been born, and if you know the rest of the story, Jean Valjean is a new man, he spends the rest of his life, rather than bitter and angry and hating the world, he spends the rest of his life pouring himself out for the marginalized and the poor and the vulnerable and those that cannot look after themselves, and that's what Paul's saying here, Paul's saying that if we will allow the gospel to soak into our hearts and to transform us and to humble us of our pride that wants to get back, if we allow the gospel to so transform us, not only will we possibly win back our enemy, it'll change us from the inside out and it'll change those that malign us and belittle us and curse us.

Friends, the gospel, this gospel power is redemptive, it changes people's lives. But there's another reason, a far more profound reason why Christians are called to live lives of radical generosity and grace.

And if you've been part of Watermark, I think you'll know why. And the reason is because this is how God in Christ has treated us. Friends, remember the night before Jesus dies, where is he?

He's celebrating the Passover meal and the Passover meal is the greatest celebration in Israel, right? It's like the family reunion meal at Lunar New Year.

[29 : 54] People travel from miles away, they come and they celebrate and they're at this Passover meal and who's there with him? His disciples, including Judas Iscariot and Jesus knows that Judas is there, right?

He says, one of you is going to betray me. But Jesus celebrates with his disciples and at one point, Judas sneaks off from the meal and while Judas is there, he's busy plotting and scheming how he can betray Jesus and he goes off, he sneaks off at one point and goes down to the temple and goes to religious leaders and he says, listen, I'll sell him to you for 30 silver coins.

They make a deal, shake hands on it, it's a deal. And Judas says, listen, later tonight he's going to go to the Mount of Olives and to Gethsemane and go arrest him there. So they make this deal, he hands over the coins.

Later that night, Jesus goes with his disciples to the Mount of Olives and he goes to Gethsemane and he's praying there. And Jesus' heart is in agony. He's in agony because he knows in a few hours' time he's going to be arrested.

He knows that he's going to be put through a sham trial. He knows he's going to be beaten and mocked and scorned and spat upon. But more than that, Jesus knows that the entire weight of God's wrath for the sins of those who will come to trust in him is going to be poured out upon him.

[31 : 18] Jesus is in such agony that the blood cells or whatever it is, under his skin, burst, and he literally starts to perspire blood.

The agony of his soul as he anticipates the cross. And while Jesus is there and he's on his knees and he's crying out to his Father in prayer, over the hill he hears this sound, this clanging of clubs and swords and shields.

And he hears this rumbling noise and he sees lights coming over the hill and there's a mob coming his way. And there at the front of the mob is Judas. And Judas walks up to him and he gives him a kiss on the cheek and he says, greetings, Rabbi.

And the word for greeting is the word be glad, rejoice. It's like Judas is saying, it's good to see you, my Rabbi. And Jesus looks him in the eye and he says, friend, do what you've come to do.

Friend, do what you've come to do. And Peter quickly realizes what's happening. Peter grabs his sword and he starts lashing out and he cuts off the ear of one of the soldiers.

[32 : 35] And Jesus says, Peter, put your sword away. And he reaches out and he puts his hand on the ear of the man who has just been slashed with the sword and he instantly heals him.

And they drag Jesus off down the hill, down into Jerusalem and they take him to that house of the high priest. And there in his house, they are accusing him of things and bringing up accusations and they're spitting on him and they're pointing their finger and they're bringing up all these things and the high priest says, this man is guilty.

And they say, we've got to take him to Pilate. And so in the morning light, they take him to Pilate and they say, Pilate, this man is causing an insurrection. He's causing a riot here. He says that he is king, not you, not Caesar.

He's causing trouble here and he's causing insurrection. Pilate, you've got to deal with this man and they bring in some false witnesses and they lie and they tell their story. And Pilate is caught up in this because he knows that Jesus is innocent but his job is on the line.

If he lets Jesus go, then Caesar's going to come down on him. And so Pilate wants to let him go but he doesn't want to lose his job and so he says, Pilate says, well, well, what must I do with him?

[33 : 48] Well, what should I do with this man called Jesus? And they say, crucify him. Pilate says, crucify him? What has he done? And they don't even answer his question. They just say, crucify him.

And so Pilate realizes it's either my job, my head, or this man. So he washes his hands and he says, okay, fine, take him away and crucify him. And they take Jesus into barracks and they beat him and they whip him bits of bone on the end of the whip.

They rip his flesh that you cannot even recognize. It's a human body. And all the while that this is going on, Jesus is thinking, I'm doing this for you.

The very people that are doing this, I'm doing this for you. And eventually they get him up to Calvary. They lay the cross on the floor. They lay him down. They tie his hands.

They smash these nails through his hands. He's nailed to the cross. They hoist up the cross and while they're there, they're laughing at him. The soldiers are bringing out some dice and they gamble for his clothing.

[34 : 53] The passers by are mocking him, saying, what an idiot, what a scumbag. He said he could save people. Look at him now. And the two criminals on either side of him are mocking him and laughing at him.

And while this is going on, Jesus is suffocating because he cannot breathe and he finds some air and he cries out, Father, forgive them.

They know not what they're doing. Friends, after all that, Jesus cries out, Father, forgive them. And Romans chapter 5 says this, while we were still weak, in other words, trapped in sin, Christ died for the ungodly.

Scarcely will anyone die for a righteous man, perhaps for a very good man, someone might be willing to. But God shows his love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were his enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son. Friends, the natural state of every human heart, no matter what your nationality or your culture or your background, the natural state of every human heart is that we are self-seeking and self-serving.

[36 : 10] And that means that we always tend towards enmity with others, but not only that, enmity with God. The God who made us and loved us, who breathed his life into us, that we might know him, our hearts by nature are at enmity with him.

We want to be our own king. We want to be our own God. And friends, if you and I were in the crowd on that fateful day, the chances are we would be shouting, crucify him.

We would be throwing our fists of rage as well. Say, do away with this man. And Jesus doesn't repay us with good because we were good to him.

Jesus doesn't look at our hearts and say, oh, you know, they love me so much, I guess I'll be good to him. While we were his enemies, while we were sinners, while we were throwing our fists at Christ and rebelling against him, Jesus went to the cross, allowed himself to be nailed there for you and for me and for the brokenness of this world.

Friends, are you a Christian this morning? If you're a follower of Jesus, you follow one who died for his enemies. Friends, every one of us here this morning that are followers of Jesus, you're only a Christian because Christ went to the cross for his enemies.

[37 : 30] Jesus laid down his life for you and for I. None of us would be Christians if Christ had not loved his enemies to death. Friends, are you not a Christian this morning?

Are you still on some kind of journey? I want to tell you today that Jesus literally loved you to death. He went to the cross for you and he drank to the very bottom the cup of God's wrath that you wouldn't have to.

And if you don't ever come to Jesus, you will die in your sin and you will face judgment. But if you come to him and surrender your life, if you hand over your life to him, Jesus takes that judgment that we deserve upon himself.

Friends, if you come and surrender to him, you'll find that Jesus will overcome the evil in your heart and Jesus will transform you. And the radical thing is he'll make you an agent for good in this world. Friends, come to Jesus. Don't go another day living your own way. Don't go another day being your own king and master. Come and surrender and bow down to King Jesus, the one who is Lord of all, but the one who loved you to death.

[38 : 39] Friends, what difference does Christianity and the gospel make? What difference does Jesus actually make in anyone's life? He makes every difference in every way. If only we'll come to him and allow his gospel to wash our hearts and to transform us from the inside out.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, sovereign God, awesome Father, tender and gracious Holy Spirit.

Father, when we read these words throughout the New Testament, Jesus, your words, and the Apostle Paul's words, and others, God, our natural inclination is to say, how can that be?

It's impossible. How can anybody respond to evil with good? But Jesus, when we contemplate your profound love for us, your profound goodness to us, God, we see a glimpse of hope.

We see a glimmer of possibility that, God, you really can change us from the inside out and that we really can experience heaven on earth. God, I want to pray, won't you make us this kind of community, won't you make us this kind of church, Lord?

[39 : 50] Won't you so get the gospel in our hearts that we become those that live like you and act like you and think like you and behave like you. And Father, I want to pray, especially for those of us maybe that, for whom this isn't just a theoretical idea, that are really in the reality of this, that there's relational tension, there's hardship, there's those that are treating us cruelly and wrongly.

God, won't you help us, I pray. Won't you give us grace. Won't you help us to take the one first step on the journey. We pray this in your wonderful and your gracious name.

Amen.