

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE GOSPEL
By Ron Harvey
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TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 15:4

INTRODUCTION

Example: There was a mother who would read to her child every night before bedtime. And she would get the book out each night before bedtime to read. And every time she would ask the child, “Which story do you want me to read tonight?” And every time, the child would select the same story. And she would say, “Don’t you want me to read a different story tonight? And the child would say, “No, I like that same old story.”

And in a certain sense, the gospel of Jesus Christ is that same old story. It is the best story in the book, so why shouldn’t we prefer it each and every time?

The gospel of Jesus Christ in one sense is the sum total of the Scriptures. Jesus said, “Search the Scriptures . . . for they testify of me.” (John 5:39)

And that is so true. From Genesis to Revelation, this book is the story of Jesus Christ. And more than that, it is the story of redemption through Jesus Christ. And so, Genesis 1:1 is the gospel and Revelation 22:21 is the gospel. And everything in between is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the good news of redemption. It is the very good news that Jesus died for sins, that he was buried and that he rose again.

This is the sum and substance of true preaching – that Jesus died, was buried and rose again. It was what the apostles preached in the book of Acts. It is what Paul taught in his epistles. And it is the story that never grows old.

Look at our text for this morning where the gospel is stated in its simplest terms.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

I Corinthians 15:4.

And this morning I want to preach to you the nuts and bolts of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I want to do that by taking you on a tour. It will be a tour of three important places. We will visit first that place called Golgotha. Sometimes it is called Calvary. And after we have gazed upon that awful place for a few moments, then we will visit the tomb where Jesus was buried. I will tell you a little bit about the tomb and then I will actually take you inside the tomb and show you around. And when we leave the tomb we will walk up the Mt. of Olives and see the place where he ascended into heaven.

Now, let's begin our tour this morning and let's walk up the road here and see,

That Place Called Golgotha

As we leave the temple area and as we pass outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, if we look to the west we see a hill. It is a stony hill and it is very near the city. It is not much more than a stone's throw from the city gates. If you look up to this hill, you will notice that it resembles a human skull. And that is why the Scriptures call it the place of the skull.

Now as we walk up the path to Golgotha, you are walking up the same path where Jesus stumbled under the weight of the cross which he carried to his own crucifixion. Even though it must have seemed like miles to Jesus, you can see that it is only a few hundred feet up the hill. Somewhere along this path Jesus was unable to continue to carry his cross and they compelled a man named Simon to carry his cross for him.

And now we come to Golgotha's hill. Sometimes we call it Calvary. Calvary is the Latin translation, but Golgotha is the original Hebrew name. And let me tell you first, that

I. Golgotha was a killing place.

It was a place in plain view from the city where the Romans would publicly torture criminals and anyone who would dare to oppose their authority. It was a place where they would make a public example out of all who dared to stand against them. It was an extremely brutal place. The Roman executioners grew dull to the pain and the inhumanity. And after a while, they took pleasure in the torture of others. It became a business and they simply worked in a human slaughterhouse.

And this served the purpose well. It was a place designed to terrify the people into absolute submission to Roman authority. And by crucifying people on this hill, in plain view of those in and around the city, the Romans maintained their domination of the people by sheer fear and terror. It was to this killing place that Jesus was taken.

And because it was a killing place,

II. It was a very chilling place.

There was an atmosphere of death here. When you walked up Golgotha's hill, there was terror in the wind and the air was heavy with death.

You could hear the screams of those who were being executed. You could hear the moaning of those who suffered. You could hear the wailing of mothers as they watched their sons die in agony. It was a cold place – this Golgotha. It was a place where the warmth of life was snuffed out and the coldness of death entered in.

Now it was a killing place. And, it was a chilling place. But I want you to know that in the case of Jesus,

III. It was a place where Jesus was willing to go for those he loved.

Even though the Scriptures say that they took Jesus and led him there (John 19:16), there was no need for the use of force. Jesus walked up that hill willingly. Like a lamb to the slaughter, Jesus walked up the hill.

Listen to what Jesus had said,

I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

John 10:17,18

This was the very moment for which Jesus came into the world. It was to die. And Jesus went as a willing sacrifice.

When they reached the place of execution, Jesus willingly stretched out his arms and they nailed him to the cross. And he hung there for about six hours and at about three in the afternoon he died.

And I want to now further describe Golgotha in theological terms by saying that,

IV. It was a place of atonement.

And we refer again to our text.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

I Corinthians 15:3

You must know that all of this that happened at Golgotha, had great redemptive implications.

Needless to say, if we had not been sinners, then Jesus would not have walked up that hill and he would not have died – for it says that Jesus died for sins.

The Scriptures are clear that Jesus did not die for the righteous, for the righteous have no need of a Savior. But he did die for sinners. And that is why it says Jesus died for our sins.

Many think that Jesus died for the socially acceptable, that he died for church goers and those who do good and those who give to charity and those who do good works. But not so, it says he died for sins.

Now let me put it in very concrete terms. Jesus never died for law keepers. But he died for law breakers. He didn't die for the man who tells the truth, but he died for the man who tells a lie. Jesus did not die for the

man who is faithful to his wife, but for the man who commits adultery. It says that he died for sins.

Jesus did not die for the man who never takes another man's property, but he died for the man who steals. Jesus did not die for the man who gives all his possessions to the poor, but Jesus died for the man who hoards it all for himself. It says he died for sins.

Jesus never died for the man who behaves perfectly. But he died for the man who misbehaves.

I want to show you a very surprising verse which shows that Jesus never died for the godly but he died for the ungodly.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:6

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:7,8

Don't think that Jesus just loves good people. Jesus did not die for good people, but he died for sinners. He didn't die for his friends, but he died for his enemies.

For (if) when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

Romans 5:10

So you see clearly that Jesus died for sins.

This is why Jesus was such a stumbling block to the Jews. They thought themselves to be righteous because they performed rituals under the law. And if they thought themselves righteous, then they had no need of Jesus, because Jesus died for sins.

Ah, but the poor sinner – he came to Jesus, because Jesus died for sins.

Jesus forgave the publican who beat on his breast and cried, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."

Jesus forgave the woman taken in adultery and he said, "Neither do I condemn thee."

Jesus forgave Mary Magdalene who was a sinner of high order. He cast her demons out and forgave her sins because he died for sins.

Rahab was known around Jericho as a harlot and by faith she received forgiveness for her sins.

Jesus sat down to eat in the house of a distinguished man of the city and a well-known sinner came in and in great gratitude washed his feet and took spices from her alabaster box and anointed him with oil because Jesus died for sinners.

On and on we could go to show you that Jesus died for sins.

Now when it says that Jesus died for sins, it means primarily that,

I. He made atonement for sins.

As simply as I can put it, a holy God was angry with sinners. God's face was fiery red in anger. His wrath was kindled against sinners everywhere. And Jesus came to make atonement.

Now in the Old Testament, Israel brought bulls and goats every day to the temple to be sacrificed. And when these animals were ceremonially slaughtered, God's anger against the people was ceremonially appeased. But because the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins, Israel had to keep making offerings day and night, year after year. And all of this was just a picture of that real sacrifice that would be made later by Jesus Christ.

And in due time, Jesus walked up to Golgotha and stretched out his arms and he died to make a real atonement for sins.

This is why our text says,

Christ died for our sins.

Bulls and goats died in the Old Testament as a type of Christ. But Christ died for our sins. So we see this awful place is where Christ made atonement for sins.

But let me ask you this question. What did this atonement actually do? To whom was the atonement principally directed? Was it directed toward the sinner so as to change the sinner? Or, was it directed toward God to change his disposition toward sinners?

And the answer is that,

II. Jesus made atonement for sins to satisfy God.

You see, God is a righteous Judge. Everything he does is just and right. And God's justness would not allow him simply to let sinners go free. You see, sinners are criminals under God's law. They are law breakers. And when they come into God's courtroom, their sin is fully exposed and God is not able to let them go free. He is not able to let them go under the dictates of his law. His law says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

And because of his impeccable holiness and his just character, he is not able to let sinners go free. He is bound by his own justice, to punish sinners.

Ah, but look at our text. (I Corinthians 15:3)

Jesus died for our sins.

The holy wrath of God was poured out on Him and the justice of God was satisfied. Now, because of the atonement made by Jesus on this hill, God may be merciful to sinners, because Jesus died for our sins.

Now at noon when Jesus was in full agony, darkness fell over the land. And then at about three in the afternoon, Jesus cried with a loud voice and yielded up the ghost.

Now this was the penalty that was prescribed for sin. The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) The soul that sinneth it shall die. (Ezekiel

18:20) And that's why it says, "Christ died for our sins. We sinned. Christ died.

Christ didn't pay the penalty for sin by merely suffering. Neither did he pay the penalty for sin by bleeding. But he paid the penalty for sin by dying. Some people think there was some magical potion in his blood as though it were the red corpuscles that saved sinners. No. It was his death that saved sinners. It says, "He died for our sins."

There was no sufficient payment for sins until Jesus died. With all the suffering that he did, had Jesus elected to forego death, there would be no atonement for sin. But Jesus endured that last indignity. And he gave up the ghost and he died.

Now when Jesus died, it says he "gave up the ghost." That is, his spirit was separated from his body. Jesus told the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. So, the spirit of Jesus went to paradise. But his body stayed behind. And the body of Jesus hung limp on the cross.

This is what happens to a man when he dies. His spirit departs to its appropriate place and the body stays behind. This is the way of death for all of us. And because Jesus was fully a man, it was so for him.

Now let me take you quickly to,

The tomb where Jesus was buried

Now the Scriptures say that in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden and in this garden there was a new sepulcher. (John 19:41) It must not have been many steps from the cross itself for it was located in the very place where he was crucified.

Now I want to take you by the hand this morning and lead you to the tomb of Jesus. And I want you to come with me there to pay your respects because it is after all the tomb of your best friend. This is no stranger's tomb. This is no grave of an unknown. This is the tomb of your brother. This is not the tomb of some nobody, but it is the tomb of your Savior. This is not the tomb of someone who never knew you, but it is the tomb of someone who loved you. It is the tomb of Jesus Christ. You may want to take off your shoes here, because we walk on holy ground.

Now let me tell you about the tomb of Jesus.

I. It was a costly tomb.

Joseph of Arimathaea was a very rich man. And, he was a disciple of Jesus. Now Joseph had purchased a tomb and he had carved it out of a rock. This was no mere hole in the ground. This was not a paupers burial place. Joseph had purchased this place and had carved this tomb out of the rock. And he intended to use it for himself. But when Jesus died, Joseph went to Pilate and requested that he be allowed to bury Jesus in his own tomb. And so, even though Jesus had no money and no possessions, he was buried here in a very costly tomb. It was a tomb fitting for royalty.

II. It was a borrowed tomb.

Jesus had nothing in this life. And he had no place to be buried. And so we see that Jesus was buried in another man's tomb. Now it is important that,

III. It was a tomb where no one else had been laid.

Now had Christ been laid in a community tomb, then they would say it was someone else who had been raised – that Jesus' bones remained. But this tomb was newly cut in the rock and it had never been used before.

But let me take you inside the tomb for a moment. Come on in and look.

As we come inside, you see here the linen clothes all wrapped up neatly; and over there, in a separate place, the napkin. You will notice how neatly they are all arranged. This is to show perhaps that no robbers came in to steal the body. Rather, at the appointed time, at that great moment in history, Jesus, lying lifeless in the tomb, opened his eyes and he got up. He was in no hurry. I suppose He took off the linen wrappings and folded them up neatly. And he left the tomb at his leisure.

Now as you stand here gazing into the tomb of Jesus, the striking thing that you notice is not what is here, but what isn't here. He is not here! And He is not here: for he has risen!

Now we find in Matthew 28 that Mary Magdalene and Jesus' mother came to visit the tomb. It was around dawn on the first day of the week and they came to see the tomb. And when they got there, they found the stone rolled back and the tomb was empty.

Now it is interesting that all day on the seventh day of the week, on the Jewish Sabbath Day, the body of Jesus rested in the tomb. This was the final observance of the Jewish Sabbath. And when the sun went down on that final Sabbath Day, the sun also set on that Old Covenant. That Old Mosaic Covenant was vanishing away. It had been a glorious covenant, for it typified Christ in every way. But now, it was fading away under the light of a better covenant.

And on the first day of the week, when the two Marys were on their way to the tomb, the sun began to rise in the east. And this time it was the bright sun of a New Covenant that rose up over the horizon. It was the dawning of a new dispensation of God's grace. It was the end of that Old Jewish age, and the beginning of a new age. It was the end of the types and the beginning of the substance.

And when the sun began to rise, on the first day of the week, Jesus opened his eyes and he sat up and he came out of the tomb. And he was alive forevermore.

Now under this New Dispensation, we worship on the first day of the week in order to distinguish between the two covenants. We no longer offer animal sacrifices, because the real sacrifice has been made. No longer do we go to human priests, because the real priest is here and he is alive. No longer is religion centered in one place and one nation, because the gospel has gone to Jews and Gentiles alike. No longer is worship found in an earthly place, but it is found in a person. And no longer do we assemble for worship on the seventh day, but we worship on the first day of the week. And all of this is a sign that Jesus has risen and he has brought in a new day of grace upon the earth to replace the old.

Now as we stand here gazing at an empty tomb, we should learn a doctrine or two:

First, we perceive the divinity of Christ. No mere man could ever raise

himself. No one ever did. In all the history of the world, no one ever raised himself. A few were temporarily raised from the dead by the power of another, but never permanently. But Jesus rose from the grave by his own power. It was impossible that death could hold him, because he was God. Death has no dominion over God. Rather, God has dominion over death.

And so, by an empty tomb, we learn that Jesus was indeed God.

But secondly, the empty tomb teaches us that believers have been acquitted – that they have received a full discharge of their sins. God the Father is satisfied with the work of Christ. Christ died for our sins and God raised him up as if to say, “Well done, thy good and faithful servant.”

When God raised up Jesus Christ from the grave, he discharged all the sins of those who were in Jesus. When God called him out of the grave, he also called his people out.

Now I want to take you to the last stop on our tour this morning. It is just a mile or so from Jerusalem. The Bible says it is a Sabbath Day’s journey. And so I take you now to,

The Mount of Olives

And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Acts 1:9-11

Now as they stood here watching as Jesus ascended up into the clouds, they must have wondered, “Where is he going?”

And the book of Hebrews tells us where he went.

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

Hebrews 10:12

Jesus passed into the heavens and he marched right to the very throne of the Father. And he brought his sacrifice – the sacrifice of himself. And he offered it for the sins of his people. And he sat down there at the right hand of God.

Now by sitting down, it means that he is there once for all. He is not like the Jewish priests that never sat down in the tabernacle - for their work was never done, because when they sacrificed animals, it did not really atone for sin.

But when Jesus died, he made a full atonement for sin. And when he went to heaven, he sat down, because his sacrificial work was complete.

Ladies and gentlemen, I offer you the Lord Jesus Christ. He walked up Golgotha's hill and died for sins. Then, on the third day he arose to prove that his work was efficient and accepted by God the Father. And he has ascended into heaven to offer his sacrifice as a sufficient atonement for sins. And he has sat down there to serve as an eternal mediator between a holy God and sinners such as us.

Are you a sinner? Then I offer the only remedy for your sin – the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.