

# The Plight of Man and the Power of God

*Good Friday Service*

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## **Truth Community Fellowship**

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It's only appropriate that we would open God's word as we come to the Lord's Table. It's only the Lord as he's revealed himself in his word. It's only as he's made himself known through the Scriptures that we can understand the significance of what we are about to do, that we can understand the significance of biblical salvation. It's so critical for us to always be brought back to remembrance the fact that Christianity is an historical religion, if I can use that term. It's an historical religion based on time and space events that happened in the past that have been recorded for our instruction and interpreted in the epistles by the apostles whom Jesus commissioned to speak on his behalf. And as we come to Scripture, we realize that we're not going through an empty ritual here that just anyone can do, this is the Lord's Table. It belongs to the Lord and he has reserved it for his people. What we read earlier from Titus 2 was that the Lord gave himself as a ransom to secure a people for himself, Titus 2:14.

So, as we come to the Lord's Table we need to understand first of all, that for someone to partake of the Lord's Table they have to belong to the Lord first. This isn't a table that's open to everyone in the world because that's not why the Lord commissioned it. This table is for Christians, those who belong to the Lord and those who understand the significance of the before and after nature of conversion. We come tonight to remember our Lord. We come to remember what he has done on our behalf and as we contemplate that, we remember as true Christians whether young or old, we can look back in our lives and realize that we once were children of darkness. There is no one who is a Christian who would deny that. Someone who would want preserve their pride and say, "I was never that bad," is someone who has never understood Christian salvation to begin with. Christ came to save sinners. He came to save those that were lost, disobedient and enslaved to various lusts, who were children of darkness.

So, as we come to the table, as we partake of the elements, it should be very conscious in our minds that as we reach into the tray to take the bread or to take the cup, that what we're doing in part is we're making a conscious public declaration that we are sinners who have no merit in ourselves to deserve the favor of God. By taking communion, we are acknowledging that we were never worthy to take it in the first place. Secondly, as we remember the Lord's body and blood with the elements, we remember that what has

happened is that the Lord has made a perfect sacrifice of himself on our behalf, that he purchased salvation for us and that we rest our hope, we stake our eternal destiny on a life which we did not live, on a death which we did not die, on a resurrection that we did not rise to. Salvation was accomplished on our behalf and we did not contribute merit to the occasion or to the event. That's what we remember when we come to communion.

So, as we gather together, as I stand before you and take the elements myself, I'm making a public declaration that I did not and do not and never could have deserved salvation. And those of you that take the elements together, you're saying the same thing and if that's not in your heart about saying that about yourself, you should let the elements pass because it means that you haven't come to grips with the real nature of sin. And we realize, we recognize that it's Christ alone that purchased this gift for us, the gift of eternal life, the gift of the forgiveness: full, free, unmerited forgiveness of our sins.

This is a gracious work we remember tonight and it's no wonder that sometime long ago, they started to call this Good Friday. It's good that we've had a Savior to intervene on our behalf. It's good that God has acted to save us. It's good that there is free forgiveness available to those who will come to Christ and so we are grateful people as we come to the Lord's Table, as we come to remember the work of Christ. It's a reminder that we were lost in sin and yet Christ has saved us in that only he could do. You see, what Christ has done is he has made a powerful act of redemption on our behalf. He has purchased our souls at the price of his own life blood and to appreciate the powerful act of redemption you have to appreciate exactly what it overcame in our sinful souls and that's what we're going to look at in part tonight.

I invite you to turn to the book of 1 John. I'm going to say some things out of 1 John that are old and some things are new. 1 John is another book that we have gone through already in our life as a church and so it's also a tie with our past as we bridge to the future in this new facility. But if you were going to put a title on your notes if you're taking notes tonight, what you should write on the top of your notes are "The Plight of Man and the Power of God." That's what we're here to remember tonight: the plight of man and the power of God. So, I'm going to break this message into two halves and the first half is we're going to talk about our past, we're going to talk about the nature of man as we consider point #1: the plight of man in sin.

The plight of man in sin. You see, Scripture describes man as being in a most miserable condition apart from Christ. He is headed for judgment before God. Hebrews 9 says that it's appointed for man to die once and after this comes judgment and man, those of you who are apart from Christ, those of us before we were in Christ, we were all in the same pot of stew. We were unable and unwilling to prepare ourselves for that verdict against our sin and the book of 1 John shows us just how desperate the condition was. You see, I think one of the hardest things to communicate to someone, one of the reasons that we so need the work of the Holy Spirit on our hearts to help us understand, is that we take such a superficial view of sin, such a superficial view of darkness, that we lose sight of the utter depth of the desperate condition that we were in before Christ saved us.

I want to take you back and kind of show you maybe three photographs, you can think about it like that, show you three photographs to help you remember before you take the communion elements, to help you remember and see with fresh eyes what it is that we are celebrating and remembering here tonight. We're not remembering a superficial act. We're not celebrating somebody who lifted our feet out of a couple of mud puddles. We're celebrating the fact that somebody went to the bottom of the ocean and took our dead corpse and resurrected us out of a mess that we could not have saved ourselves from.

What is it about the plight of man in sin? Well, first of all, as we're going to see here in 1 John, is that we blend into the world. We blend into the world and the world opposes God and opposes his will. Let's look at Scripture finally. 1 John 2, beginning in verse 15. The point here is to simply see the fact that this is what we came out of, this is what Christ saved us out of.

“15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

The description there of what we see of the environment in which we live, the very water in which the fish swim, the world is opposed to God and opposed to his will. What we move and live and have our being in, in terms of our human relationships and the human philosophies that shape the way people think in the world, it's all opposed to God. It's opposed to his will. It is not what God has established as the measure of righteousness. Look at the passage with me again, “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life,” that which is proudly displayed on every supermarket counter at the checkout stand screams out against everything that Christ and his word stand for. The entertainment and all of that, all of that that just surrounds and embeds our minds, what education brings to the table, blending into the world, appealing to our lusts, appealing to our pride and driving us away from God. Here's the thing: you and I were walking about in that world and swimming downstream with the current, going in the same direction. We were people who loved darkness, Scripture says in John 3, and the current was going there and we weren't even trying to get out. We weren't trying to swim upstream, we were comfortable in that environment which is opposed to God and his will. We blended in.

The Apostle John goes on and talks about the nature of the world in 3:1. In 3:1 he starts out with a statement about how great it is to be a Christian but what I want you to notice is what's tucked away at the end, is that the world opposes Christ and opposes Christianity. Chapter 3, verse 1, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.” Now, watch this, “For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” There was no recognition of Christ. There was no acceptance of Christ. Instead, there was rejection and

crucifixion of Christ. The world into which we were born, the world in which we were comfortable, in which we moved about in, is opposed to Christ and opposed to his will.

And we blended into that environment. We blended in with the lusts of the eyes and the lusts of the flesh and the boastful pride of life. We blended in. Some of us can remember with scars on our heart about the times when we, ourselves, were blasphemers of the name of Christ, when we spoke against him, when we opposed those and mocked those who would bring the gospel. That was a mark of the fact that we were embedded into the world and we belonged there and we wanted it that way. We mocked those who brought the gospel to us because we did not want Christ, because we hated Christ and we resisted it. We were not naturally attracted to Christ and his gospel. This is the picture of the world and that's what you and I belonged to. Look at the end of verse 1 there again, 3:1, this is why "the world does not know us." It does not recognize Christians. It does not accept them because it did not know and did not accept Christ and we all blended into that environment.

One other thing about the world: it's filled with false teachers. Chapter 4, verse 1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." And so, just in this little brief survey of some key passages in 1 John, I just want to kind of paint the back-drop against which Christ entered in and brought salvation to us. We belong to a world environment, a philosophical environment that we embrace and that was opposed to God. We belong to an environment that hated Christ and hates those who know him. That's why Fox's "Book of Martyrs" has multiple volumes. That's why 11 of the 12 apostles were martyred for the faith. That's why Stephen was stoned in Acts 7 at the very beginning of the growth of the church. It's because the world hates this and wants nothing to do with it.

Then, to add other discordant strings to the symphony, false teachers, false doctrines, promising a broad way of salvation, promising false hope that God cares only about your health and wealth and promising things that Scripture has never given, saying that there are many ways to heaven: that you can go through Islam, you can go through Catholicism, you can go through Mormonism. And just the multiplication of false teachings and people who love it so. So, we're in an environment that just ricochets with bullets and shrapnel of opposition to the God of the Bible and the unsaved man fits into that environment like a fish swims in water. That's what you and I were like. Not to the worst degree in every possible category but our hearts were filled with deception, our hearts were filled with sin and just like a fish can't jump out of water, we couldn't jump out of our environment to save ourselves. We blended into the world and that was our plight in sin. Our very environment in which we lived was arrayed against us.

Now, as you continue to read in 1 John, you realize that the situation was worse than that. It's not just that we were living in a hostile environment through which we could never find the truth on our own, the plight of man in sin is worse than just that because Scripture teaches that the man in sin, the unsaved man, is actually blinded by Satan. He's actually blinded by Satan. It's not just that he blends into the world, he's blinded by Satan.

Scripture clearly describes the unsaved man as being subject to a hostile spiritual supernatural enemy called the devil, called Satan and this supernatural enemy keeps him in darkness. Satan, Scripture teaches us, obscures the gospel by stimulating sin and promoting false doctrine through false teachers that complicate the simple clarity of the gospel. We had a supernatural task-master over our souls who was intent on our destruction.

Look at 1 John 3:8, “the one who practices sin is of the devil., he belongs to the devil, “for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” Sin found its source in Satan's deception in the Garden of Eden and the sin in unbeliever's lives now are simply the fruit of that original sin. The devil sinned from the beginning, the one who practices sin is of the devil. Jesus said that when you lie, you're acting as the one who is the son of the father of lies.

Look at chapter 4:3, “every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” Antichrist: opposed to Christ. So, the world is not only its own environment of opposition to the gospel, Satan is sent out and there is the spirit of antichrist at work in the world through false doctrine, false teachers, that is supernaturally opposing the proclamation of the gospel.

John goes on to say that, in chapter 5:19, look at that with me, he says, “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” When you look back on your life before Christ as a Christian now, you should look back with a degree of understanding and realize how desperate your condition was and how much danger you were in. You were in an environment opposed to Christ and you belonged to that environment. You were subject to the slavery of Satan and Satan supernaturally was blinding you to prevent you from being saved to the extent that that was within his power. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 says the “gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” Blinded, supernaturally blinded. Going about blindfolded in an environment that was dark and black.

Oh beloved, our situation was so desperate. We were captive to this wicked foe and yet the plight was still worse. You see, it wasn't just outside us in our environment, it wasn't just in the hidden realm, the unseen realm of spiritual darkness in which our souls were held captive, we were bound by our own sin. You see, and this is where it gets really personal: this is where you come and find one of the dividing lines between true Christians and false Christians, those who aren't Christians at all, although they would name the name of Christ, because this goes to the death blow of pride in the human heart. At your core, if you are, I speak in the present tense to those of you that are not Christians tonight, at your core before you came to Christ, as I speak to believers. At the core, man himself is hostile to God. He does not seek God. Romans 3 says he does not want God to reign over him and he cannot come to God through his own human power and wisdom.

Scripture is so abundantly clear on this that we were desperately lost and we were unable to save ourselves.

Look at 1 John 2:9. We'll just look at a couple of verses in this letter and then stretch out to some other places of Scripture that add additional light to it. 1 John 2:9, "The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now." Verse 11, "The one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Turn back to the book of Romans 3 to a familiar passage. Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one." There is not an exception to Romans 3 in this room.

So, what I want you to see is this: here you were in a hostile environment that did nothing to point you to Christ; here you were in sin, blinded by the devil who was actively provoking opposition to the gospel in your heart and preventing you from understanding the gospel; here you were as an unbeliever with your own sin in your heart, not even seeking God to be delivered from that desperately dark condition which was going to deliver you over into eternal judgment. That's the plight of man in sin. Do you see how desperate this is? This is no superficial matter. This is no joking matter. This is not a matter of casual indifference that you can take or leave and pass it by. This is the state of humanity. This is what spiritual life is like without Christ. Bound in sin? You bet. Jesus said in John 3:19 that men love the darkness rather than the light. He says they won't come to the light because they don't want their evil deeds exposed. Can you imagine? I don't know whether to laugh or cry, it's so tragic. But the very one thing that could save a man's soul, he hides from, he won't go to because he loves sin more than anything else.

That's what the Bible describes about us. Romans 8:7-8, you can turn there if you wish. "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God for it does not subject itself to the law of God for it is not even able to do so and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." One more: 1 Corinthians 2:14, "A natural man," that is, an unsaved man, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, for they are spiritually appraised." It takes a moment of silence, really, to let that kind of sink in. Scripture tells us that we once loved sin, that we were hostile toward God, that we could not understand the gospel, that a demonic supernatural foe was blinding as we walked about in a world environment that was hostile to the only Savior of our souls. We were a black cat walking in a dark room which had no doors and windows. There was nothing but darkness. There was nothing we could do to save ourselves. That's the plight of man in sin. That's where you and I who are now believers in Christ, that's where we once were.

Now, brothers and sisters in Christ, do you realize that when we come to this table we are remembering a deliverance from that condition? Do you realize that we are remembering a deliverance that must, by definition, have been supernatural because the darkness was supernatural. To be delivered from that took a supernatural act by the power of God. That's the only way that it could be. It took something even more supernatural, even

something more powerful that over-rule the force of the world, the force of Satan and the force of sin in our own hearts. When we come to the table, beloved, we are remembering something great and lofty and of unspeakable significance that was done for us at the initiative of one who owed us no debt.

We've seen the plight of man in sin, let's get to the good stuff tonight. Let's talk about the power of God in salvation. The power of God in salvation. This is the second half of the message. Just with that little bit of an outline of the plight of man in sin, beloved, it's obvious that if salvation was going to come at all, it had to come at the initiative of God. It had to come at the initiative of a holy one. It had to come at the initiative of someone outside of us because we've already seen there was no one who seeks God. We've already seen that we could not understand the gospel. We've already seen that we don't come to the light because we prefer darkness to the light. And so, if we are going to be Christians at all, it takes the power of God to make that happen because we don't have the power or the desire in our own hearts to make it happen on our own. We couldn't save ourselves, we wouldn't save ourselves. It took the power of God.

Look at 1 John 5:1. We'll go through some parallel points here but, 5:1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of him." John, as he has elsewhere in the book of 1 John, has appealed to the analogy, using the picture of birth, God just like a human parent gives birth to a child, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it's because God has given birth to you. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that he is the divine Messiah sent to save sinners in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that he was born, crucified and resurrected as the payment for your sin. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that he is the Son of God, equal with the Father, with full authority over you. You embrace him and – listen – you stake your entire eternal destiny entirely on him and his mercy, entirely on him and his righteousness, entirely on him and his shed blood as the only hope of your redemption because you realize that you cannot save yourself.

So, beloved, when we come to the table, we're reminded afresh of the humility with which we approach this remembrance. We realize that we're remembering something that Christ did for us, not something that we did for Christ. That is the most fundamental thing to recognize about Christian salvation is that it is something that is done for you, not something that you do for God. None of your prayers, none of your religious rituals, could do anything to wash away the stain of a single sin on your soul.

Now, beloved, I want to show you the power of God in salvation in three different ways here from the book of 1 John and it's all in survey. First of all, I want you to remember the sacrifice for your faith. The sacrifice for your salvation. Look at 1 John 1:7. Where is it that we find cleansing from this guilt of sin? Where is it that we find salvation? Well, John lays it out right at the start of his book, 1 John 4:7, he's speaking to Christians and he says "if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and," here it is, "the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin." Watch the subject, the verb and the direct object here: it is the blood that does the cleansing of sin. It

is not something that we did for ourselves, it is the sacrifice of Christ that we remember tonight that alone provides the cleansing of sin. It came from outside us.

Beloved, it came before we were even born. We didn't initiate this. This was something that Christ executed on behalf of the Father's plan. Christ executed that plan before we were even born. That's what we're remembering. That's the magnitude and the breadth and the height and the depth of the greatness of Christian salvation that we remember tonight. The blood of the sinless Son of God was shed to cleanse you from all of that darkness of your plight in sin.

Look at chapter 2:2 as it speaks about our Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:2, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins," meaning that he is the sacrifice that atones for our sins. Christ himself, the God-man himself, is the one, the sacrifice. He himself was the sacrifice that turned away the wrath of God on our behalf. It wasn't the initiative of our own works. It wasn't the initiative of our Sinner's Prayer. It wasn't the initiative of us looking for Christ. If you're in Christ tonight, beloved, and praise God that so many of you are, what we remember tonight is that we're in Christ at his initiative, at his deliverance of us, not because we delivered ourselves. We believe in response to a work of God in our hearts.

Look at 1 John 4:19. Where did the initiative come from? What was the priority? Who started this salvation from sin, Satan and the world? Verse 19, "We love, because He first loved us." God was the initiator. Christ was the sacrifice. The Spirit applied it to our hearts in a great Triune work. Beloved, as you look at these elements that you'll soon be partaking, even the way that you receive them tonight, it's initiated and brought to you. Christ came and brought salvation at the cross. The Spirit came into our lives and worked in our hearts and changed us so that we would repent and believe in Christ. It's because he first loved us and that crucifies human pride. That crucifies boasting. That crucifies any sense that I'm better than someone else. I am brought to utter humiliation at the foot of the cross and I'm grateful to find myself there. Any Christian is grateful to find themselves there because a true Christian disclaims any credit, disclaims any merit and gives all the glory to the one who hung on the tree alone, mocked, spat upon, crucified. We remember Christ and we give him all the glory because we remember where we came from in our plight and we realize that if we're saved, it's because God did a work that we don't take credit for. We love because he first loved us.

So, beloved, when you look at this table, when the elements are passed to you and you pull them out of the trays in just a moment, your heart should well up with gratitude, with unspeakable thanksgiving. Some of you, one of the beauties of being in a church like ours, small enough to know people, to know your background, knowing some of the darkness that you've come out of, the darkness of false religion, the darkness of unspeakable sin, the darkness of substance addiction, to realize that you're no longer like that dark one. That old man has been put away in salvation and now you are someone new and you belong to the holy Son of God as his treasured possession, the object of his affection, the purpose of his redeeming love. There should be such gratitude that fills your heart. With such a complete self-emptying that simply says, "Lord, I'm in this



blessed spiritual position because you had grace on me. I'm in this blessed spiritual position because you had mercy on me. I'm in this blessed spiritual position because you loved me and gave yourself up for me.”

You see, this isn't a ritual that we're going through. We're not going through a motion of church life here when we as Christians come to the Lord's Table. We are engaging in a profound act of remembrance that prompts our heart to gratitude. We look back and see unspeakable darkness in our past and now we find ourselves in the light, we find ourselves filled with joy, peace, love and all of the fruit of the Spirit and we say, “I'm on the receiving end of a great, great gift.” Look at 1 John 5:11. Notice the verbs. It's so easy to run by the verbs but here it is and this is where we close before we move to the table, “The testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”

It's a gift. We have received a gift of eternal incalculable value and that's why we're here tonight to remember Christ. We remember the giver. We remember the sacrifice. And we remember it with gratitude.

Bow with me in prayer.

*Father, if you saved us, we know that you will keep us. We know that you who began a good work will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. And so, as we gather around your table this evening, Lord, we remember that our salvation came to us at the cost of the life blood of Christ. We gratefully remember you, Lord Jesus, and that you delivered us from our plight in sin.*

Beloved, with your heads bowed, the Bible calls us to take the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. We freely and gladly invite everyone who knows the Lord Jesus Christ to join us in the celebration of his table. But if you're not a Christian or if you're a professing Christian living in sin, we would ask you to let these elements pass until you've made things right with the Lord. This table is for those who have forsaken sin, not those who still pursue it. So, with that note of gratitude, Lord, we now come to the table and we pray in Christ's name.

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