

Jesus Came in the Likeness of Sinful Flesh

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[0 : 00] We're going to read the first four verses of Romans chapter 8. So turn to Paul's epistle to the Romans chapter 8. Very famous words here that we begin with. Paul writes, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do.

By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

Who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Let's pray. Father, we ask you to send your Spirit now to do what your Word speaks of him doing.

Setting us free from the law of sin and death. And we ask you that he would do that work through his Word now. It's in Jesus' name that we pray.

[1 : 08] Amen. You all know that on Friday we were all reminded, we were all made painfully aware of the presence of sin and evil in our world.

And in fact, we have, it seems, been with increasing frequency made aware of the reality of evil. The reality of sin in the world around us in the last few years.

And we, we sort of look on as spectators watching the news and hearing all the details of things that happen in other places. And we rightly call those who do those sorts of things evil.

We rightly say that they are wicked, that they've done a sinful thing. And we rightly say that they deserve to be condemned. They deserve not only our judgment, but they deserve some sort of divine judgment upon them.

And we, we rightly say those kinds of things. But there is a, a danger, I'm afraid, every time these sorts of events happen. There is a danger that we will begin to see sin. Or that we will begin to see evil as something that is out there.

[2 : 19] That is a, a problem that a, that a few sick individuals wrestle with. And that we suffer because it is a problem within them, within their own psyche, or within their own heart. And it is, it is something that occasionally impacts us.

But that it's there. It's their problem. It's within them. When the scriptures would tell us a completely different story. We are right to call them evil.

We are right to say that acts of murder and violence and terror are wicked and sinful. But we are wrong to think that that is there and not here. Because the problem is within me and my heart.

The problem is within you and your heart. Which is why in this same book, in chapter 3 of Romans, verse 23, Paul says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

All of us have sinned. It's why he says a few verses before that, that there is no one who does good, not even one. He says that there is no one righteous.

[3 : 25] Not a single person upon the face of the earth who is a descendant of Adam can claim to be good. Can claim to be righteous. Can claim to do good things.

Now that may sound puzzling to us. Because we look around us and we see people serving the poor. We see people taking in children into their homes. We see people doing good things all the time.

And we think, well, that can't be true. And Paul says, no one does good because I know people who do good things. In fact, I have occasionally done good things myself.

I have taken food to my neighbor when they were sick. Or I have helped people around me. I have helped family members. I have visited people in the hospital. I have done things. I am not perfect, but I have done things that I think in general we would all recognize as good things.

So how can the apostle say and how can he be inspired by God when he says there is no one who does good? What does that mean?

[4 : 22] It means that when you measure righteousness and when you measure goodness with a vertical standard rather than a horizontal standard. What I mean is when you determine what's good and right based upon the character of God rather than relative to the character and actions of the people around you.

What you will realize is that in the light of God's holiness, no one is holy. In the light of God's goodness and the demands of his law, no one truly does what is good.

If you go to the level of motive, if you go to the level of heart, even when we do things that we can legitimately say on a horizontal level are good things.

They are not ultimately good things. And all of us find ourselves in the same situation. People who have fallen short of the glory of God.

People who have fallen short of the standards of God's words. And we all stand as sinners. And the scriptures say that because of that, it is not the mass murderer merely who stands condemned by God.

[5 : 26] It is you. It is me apart from Christ. We stand before God deserving his judgment and under his condemnation. So that if you read Romans backwards in chapter three, verse 23, he says all have sinned.

Then he says no one has done good and there's no one who is righteous. But if you back up more to verse 18 of chapter one, and it says that the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness of men.

That's you and me. We're the unrighteous. And the wrath of God is revealed against us, unleashed upon us apart from Jesus.

And Christmas is a time when we come to celebrate freedom from that wrath.

I know that when things happen like happened on Friday this close to Christmas, it's confusing oftentimes for us because we sing about peace on earth and we look around us and we don't see peace in the world.

[6 : 32] We don't see that. We see murder. We see violence. We see terrorism. We see wars spread across the earth in various nations. We see dictators punishing their people who have done nothing to them.

We see incredible amounts of violence and evil in the world. We do not see peace. And yet I still maintain that the message of Christmas is indeed a message of peace upon the earth.

Not simply peace in the eradication of violence and evil now, but peace in the sense of solving the problem that you and I have in our own personal war with our creator.

Christ has come, yes, ultimately one day to bring peace to the entire earth and the scriptures tell us that he will. But he has come to do far, far more than that.

He has come to establish peace in your heart between you and your creator. That ultimately is the message of Christmas.

[7 : 34] And it's the message that I find here at the beginning of the book of Romans of chapter eight of the book of Romans. Romans. Now, you'll notice in these verses that we read, there is no there's no manger.

There are no wise men. There are no shepherds. There's no Mary, no Joseph, no star, no stable. And yet none of those things are the are the essence of the Christmas message.

None of those things are at the core of the meaning of the incarnation of Christ. We find that essence. We find that core, that that that that rock bottom meaning to what Christmas is about in verse three.

Take a look at it. It says that God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do. If you have a period in your translation, the way that I do pretend that it's not there because I don't think it should be there.

Put a comma. All right. For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.

[8 : 38] He condemned sin in the flesh. You see Christmas there? It says that he sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh. That is the basic message of Christmas.

That's what Advent is about. That's what the coming of Jesus is about. Now, you read that and you think to yourself, Paul, do you think you could have said that in a little bit more complicated fashion?

Why does he say it in that kind of way? He sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Why not say it more simply? Like maybe the way that John says it in John 3, 16, that God loved the world and sent his one and only son.

That's a simple way to say it. Why not just say, Paul, that God did what the law couldn't do by sending his son? Or maybe say it the way that John says it in John chapter 1, verse 14, that the word became flesh.

Why not just say that Jesus came in the flesh? Why does he have this complicated, convoluted phrase that he came in the likeness of sinful flesh?

[9 : 42] Why? Well, I believe the reason that he says it that way is because he wants us to understand not merely the bare fact that Christ came. Paul wants to help us to dig beneath the facts and to see the how and the why of the incarnation of Jesus.

He wants to see why Jesus came to the earth. He wants us to see how Jesus came to the earth. In fact, you can see the you can see the why very easily in this passage if you just read it backwards. So that if you read verse three and then two and then one, you can see it. And that's easy to do if you just change the word that's translated for or in some of your translations as because. Look at look there.

You see it in verse three. Verse three begins with the word for or because. Verse two begins with the word for or because. If you just change that word to therefore, you can read it backwards and you can see very clearly Paul's logic and why Christ came.

Let me give you an example illustration of what I'm talking about. I might say to you, I'm I'm I'm going to go to Chick-fil-A because I'm hungry.

[10 : 50] I could say that. All right. And so, you know that the reason that I'm going to go to Chick-fil-A, not today because it's Sunday, but any other day of the week. The reason that I'm going to go to Chick-fil-A, get a spicy chicken sandwich.

And the reason is because I'm hungry or I could turn that sentence around backwards and would say the exact same thing. If I change the word because to therefore I could say I'm hungry.

Therefore, I'm going to go to Chick-fil-A and get a spicy chicken sandwich. You see, it says the same thing, but you turn it backwards. We're going to do that with this passage. We're going to read it backwards and we're going to substitute therefore for the word because or for.

So follow me here. I want you to see clearly why Jesus came. All right. God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Therefore, the law of the spirit of life has set you free from the free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[11 : 55] We say more simply. All right. God sent his son into the world. Therefore, we have been set free from sin and death. And therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ so that the sending of Jesus into the world results in the verdict in God's court of no condemnation.

That's the end. That's the purpose. That's the goal of Jesus coming into the world so that ultimately what would hang over us and over our lives on judgment day in God's court would be the verdict of no condemnation.

No condemnation over us. No condemnation over us and over our lives. Jesus came to set us free from condemnation. That's why he came.

And if you begin to ask the how question, you can see it in the in the wording of verse three. How does the coming of Christ into the world set us free from the condemnation that we rightly deserve? Well, here it is in the words. He sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. He sent him in the likeness of sinful flesh.

[13 : 06] He does not say that he sent his son into the world as sinful flesh because that would not be true. It's true. It's true to say that he sent his son into the world in the flesh.

But Paul wants to say much more than they sent him into the world with a real body. He's saying that, but he wants to say far more than that. He wants us to understand specifically how Jesus being in the world is different from the way in which you and I are in the world.

Because since the fall of Adam, since the Garden of Eden, this world has been suffering the effects of the fall. So that if you just look down in chapter eight and move your eyes down to verse 20, it says that the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it.

So that when Adam fell, all the creation was affected. Everything. Everything. Why is there decay in the world? Why? Why is there decay in the universe?

Why do things tend to move from order to disorder? And why does everything move inexorably towards death? Why is that a reality in our universe?

[14:17] It's not a reality in our universe because God created it that way. Genesis chapter one tells us that God looked at everything that he created and he said that it was good. There was no death. There was no decay. There was no movement towards chaos.

In creation. But since Genesis chapter three occurred. Since the fall. All of creation has been subjected to futility and death and decay.

And you and I are no different. In fact, we can say far more about the effects of the fall upon us. We are not only subject to death now.

We are now subject to judgment and condemnation. I want you to turn back a couple of pages in Romans. In your Bible to chapter five. And I just want to hit a few phrases here in the second half of chapter five so that you can see the effects of the fall upon humanity.

Verse 12 says that just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. And so death spread to all men because all sin. Move down to verse 15.

[15:26] Verse 15 in the middle says that many died for one man's trespass. Verse 16 in the middle says that the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation.

Verse 17. Because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man. Verse 18. One trespass led to condemnation for all men.

And then verse 19. By one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners. This is the reality of the fall. That when Adam fell, he fell and brought all the creation and all of his physical descendants down with him.

And then. So we come into this world, as Paul says, as children of wrath. It's who we are. It's in your DNA. There's a reason why you never teach a two-year-old how to lie or disobey.

There's a reason. Because they're born with the ability to lie and disobey. They're born with the inclination towards sin. Almost all of my boys at some point in time have decided to play with the light socket.

[16:35] Which is why in our last house, we had those little spring-loaded, impossible-to-plug-in-a-plug light sockets. So that they couldn't stick anything in it. But then I couldn't plug anything in it either. It was very frustrating.

But every one of them. And they crawl over to it when they start to crawl. Because it's right at eye level when you're crawling. And they're fascinated by it. And you kind of slap their hand. You say, no, no, that'll hurt you. As soon as you turn around, first thing they do is head right back toward it. Because disobedience is built into who we are. That's just who we are since the fall. But not so with Jesus. Jesus came born of a woman.

Jesus came as the seed of the woman. Jesus came as a second Adam. A last Adam. Which means that Jesus, like Adam, should have been born into paradise.

Jesus deserved Eden. But what Jesus got was chaos. Jesus, though sinless.

[17:38] Paul says that he knew no sin. The writer of Hebrews says that he was made like us in every way. But without sin. Jesus came into this world morally pure and perfect.

And he did not get paradise as Adam did. Jesus received and came into a fallen, broken world. That's what he got. When Paul says that Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh. What he is telling us is that the perfect son of God came into a fallen, sinful world.

And he suffered his entire life. He endured and he was well acquainted with grief. I mean, consider the fact that we don't hear anything about Jesus' earthly father, Joseph.

Beyond the story of Jesus when he is 12. In the Gospel of Luke. We don't know anything else about Joseph. He apparently lived long enough so that he passed on his trade of being a carpenter to his son, Jesus.

[18:42] But by the time Jesus is an adult, Joseph is off the scene. And so the only thing we can exclude from that is that as a teenager or a young adult, Jesus lost his father. Which means he was acquainted with the grief of losing a very close loved one in his family.

Jesus knew sleeplessness. Jesus knew what it was to be hungry and thirsty and in pain. Jesus knew what it was like to lose a close friend to death.

Jesus knew what it was like to be betrayed by his closest friends. Jesus knew what it was like to be beaten and mocked and spit upon and ultimately killed.

Jesus came into a fallen world. He deserved Eden. He deserved paradise. He got pain.

He got this world. So what Paul is telling us is that Jesus came not as he deserved to come into the world. Jesus came to experience what we have experienced.

[19 : 48] He came to enter into our experience of pain and death without deserving it himself. And then he adds to this, he came in the likeness of sinful flesh.

He adds a second description of the coming of Christ. And he says that he came for sin. Now that phrase, for sin, in the Greek version of the Old Testament is used as a sort of technical term most of the time to refer to a sin offering.

So that when an Israelite would break God's law, then they would go to the temple and they would offer a lamb or a dove or some kind of animal sacrifice, a blood sacrifice, so that God would then forgive their sins.

That was a sin offering. And what Paul is saying here is that Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh and he came as a sin offering.

He didn't come to offer up a sin offering merely. He came to be a sin offering. Or as Paul says in Romans chapter 3, he came, God sent his son to be a propitiation, a sacrifice that removes and absorbs the wrath of God against someone else.

[21 : 02] Jesus came into this world as a spotless, perfect lamb so that he might be slain as a spotless, perfect lamb in our place.

How did Jesus come into this world? How did Jesus come into the world? He came into the world morally pure to suffer all the indignity of a fallen world, ultimately culminating in his death on the cross.

That's why he came. And look at what he has accomplished. Because of that, the scriptures say that we have been set free from the law of sin and death.

The power of sin and death. The principle of sin at work in our own hearts. The reason that we come into this world as children of wrath.

The reason that we are all inevitably going to go off into sin. The reason, the root cause of all of the evil in the world and the evil within you and me.

[22 : 13] Jesus came to set us free from the penalty of sin and death and the power of sin over us. And because of that, he can earn for us in God's court the verdict of no condemnation.

That's what Christmas is about. Christmas is not about all the other things that surround the story. Those details are important for helping us to understand what was happening when Jesus was born.

But those details do not tell us the purpose. What did the angel say to Joseph? They came to Joseph and he told Joseph, You're going to name the son Jesus. Because he will save his people from their sins.

That is why he came into the world. So that he might set us free from sin. And by setting us free from sin, he has set us free from the condemnation that we deserve.

We will all, at the end of our lives, have one of two banners flying over us. We will either have a banner that says, Condemned. Or we will have a banner that says, No condemnation.

[23 : 31] Every one of us. And the only difference between which banner hangs over your life is whether or not you are, as Paul says, In Christ Jesus. The only thing that makes the difference between condemnation and no condemnation is faith in Jesus.

If you trust in him, if you put your faith in him, he will set you free from the effects and power and condemnation of sin. And he will give you life if you but trust in him.

And the real question becomes then, How do we know if we've trusted in him? How do you know which banner will fly over your life?

Well, the answer is at the very end. Verse 4 tells us that Christ came to be a sin offering in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us so that we might receive Christ's righteousness to cover our sins.

And then he defines who we are. The us who receive Jesus' righteousness are those who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

[24 : 51] That does not mean that those who live obedient lives earn a righteous standing before God.

That does not mean that those who walk according to the Spirit instead of the flesh have come to deserve God's favor. This is not a description of what we do to earn a right standing before God. This is a description of what those who already have been given a right standing before God look like in practical daily living. You want to know if you've trusted in Jesus? Ask yourself, Do I walk according to the flesh? According to the Spirit? You want to know if your faith is real and vibrant and genuine? Do you walk according to the flesh? Or do you walk according to the Spirit? There will be a banner that hangs over your life at the end of it all. Which one will hang over you?
[25 : 55] Let's pray.