

“A REALITY CHRISTMAS TREE”

1 Peter 2:24

INTRODUCTION

1. How many of you remember a walk like that looking for the perfect Christmas tree? I think it's almost a rite of passage into manhood for many guys to look for the perfect tree they can cut down at Christmas. My dad took me when I was a boy. I took my daughters with me to do the same thing when they were little.

How many of you have a real Christmas tree in your house? I'm talking about the real deal... the kind you have to water, the kind that has needles that fall on the floor, and the kind that makes you sneeze and give you raspy throats.

How many of you have artificial trees or fake trees in your home? Well, we've migrated in our family traditions, too. We went from a real tree we had to cut with our own hands...to a real tree somebody else cut for us... to a fake tree we decorated from the ground up... to a fake tree that already has lights in it.

2. As you can imagine, selling Christmas trees is big business in America. Somewhere around 36 million Christmas trees are produced in this country... on more than 1 million acres of land planted for that purpose. Over 100,000 people work full-time in the Christmas tree industry. About one in five American households have a real tree this Christmas compared to about 50% who have an artificial tree.

3. Like several traditions associated with Christmas today, the practice of decorating trees at this time of the year actually may have originated during the Roman pagan holiday called, “Saturnalia.” But, about 1,300 years ago in

Germany, Christians celebrated Christmas with a tree that was called the, “*Christbaum*” or the “*Christ Tree*.”

Eg. Much of what we do today with Christmas trees may be traced to the activity of Martin Luther during the Reformation. Legend tells us that Luther was walking through the woods one dark evening. As he looked at the trees in the forest, he noticed a backdrop of beautiful stars behind them. He came up with the idea of trying to reproduce the effect of stars on trees. So, he decorated a small tree with candles for his children to show them how the stars twinkle through the night. Martin Luther was actually the first person in history that brought a tree from the outside to the inside of a home and decorated the tree with lights.

4. Now when you come to the Scriptures, you discover the significance of wood from trees around the world. We're told that Noah built an ark from the wood of a gopher tree. Abraham carried wood from a tree up Mount Moriah to offer a sacrifice to God. David built the Temple from wood of cedar and cyprus trees. Wood from the acacia tree was used to construct the Ark of the Covenant that's placed in the most holy location of the Temple.

5. But the most important reference to a tree in the Bible is associated with Jesus. The Bible describes Jesus' death on a cross as being nailed to a tree.

Peter says it like this in Acts 5:

“The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree” (Acts 5:30).

And Paul says it like this in Acts 13:

“When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.” (Acts 13:29)

Over and over, the cross of Jesus is referred to in Scripture as a tree. Perhaps the greatest description of that tree is found in one verse in which we’ll focus our attention this morning. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, why don’t you turn with me to I Peter 2:24?

Remember, the original term for the Christmas tree was from a German word that actually means *“Christ’s Tree.”* The Bible tells us the cross was Christ’s Tree. For all intents and purposes, the cross was God’s Christmas tree for all the world to see down through history. It was planned, purchased and placed on this planet for the benefit of every human being. This morning, we want to see the benefits of what Jesus accomplished for us on that tree 2000 years ago. Look at what Peter wrote in I Peter 2:24.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” (I Peter 2:24).

So with those in mind, I want you to see these three benefits provided for us through God’s Christmas tree... the cross of Jesus Christ.

First, through His death...

1. JESUS PROVIDED THE PAYMENT FOR MY SIN

Did you notice that 1st phrase in the verse?

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24a).

Did you know that’s really the theme of the whole Bible? If you want to know what the Bible is all about, from Genesis to Revelation, this is it! the promises, the prophecies and the pictures of the Old Testament anticipate the death of Jesus on the cross! You can’t read through the Old Testament without being reminded that God requires satisfaction for my sin.

As you read through the New Testament, you discover the cross is mentioned in every book. Matthew spends 141 verses describing in 2 chapters how Jesus died on God’s Christmas tree. Almost half the Gospel of John describes the journey Jesus took to the cross. You will never understand the story about the birth of Jesus until you understand the significance of the death of Jesus. The clearest statement about the purpose of Jesus’ death is found in these words:

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.”

In other words, on the cross, Jesus died for my sin and in my place. He was my substitute! He paid for the debt I owed God!

Paul says it like this to the Colossians:

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:21-22).

The writer of Hebrews says it like this:

“...Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22b).

Some of you have wondered why Jesus had to die. Here's the answer: Without the death of Jesus, we are unacceptable to God because of our sin.

Eg. Many years ago, in a famous court case in Alabama, a boy was brought before his father who was the judge. It's always the custom for the judge to step down from the bench when a relative is brought into the courtroom. This judge did not step down.

When the boy was found guilty, he cried to his dad: *“Can't you forgive me?”*

The judge said, *“Yes, I can and do forgive you, but I cannot justify you. I cannot justify you before the law. I cannot even justify you before God. You will have to pay the penalty.”*

That's where we stand before God without Jesus. You and I are guilty and separated from a perfect God. But when Jesus died for us, He declared us right with God, because He satisfied all the justice of a perfect God.

I love these words of Peter:

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:18,19).

It is not until we lean fully on the payment Jesus made for us when He died on the cross that we are declared right with God. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible says we have *“peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.”* All the barriers that separate us from God and His holiness are removed through the work of Christ.

Eg. It's no wonder the old song says, *“So I'll cherish the old rugged cross...”*

The root of the troubles of this world is not the failure of government, the lack of education or the lack of money to finance new programs. The root of problems in this world is that mankind is separated from the perfect God. It's not until we come to Him by faith in the cross of Jesus Christ that a peace treaty with God Himself is declared. Suddenly, things are right within us and right with God.

Eg. One great Bible teacher years ago made this statement:

“Christianity is the religion of access.”

Do you know what that means? All religions of the world shut out man from God. Religions are nothing but ritual and liturgy. Religion actually blocks the way to God.

It's not until God did something for us that we could have access into His holy presence. That's what Jesus did on God's Christmas tree. That's what He did on the cross.

Eg. One of the Christmas gifts that is especially popular today is a gift certificate. When you buy a gift certificate to a certain store or restaurant, you purchase a specified amount to be used just like cash. I want you know that at the foot of the cross of Jesus, there's a certificate. It says you and I can directly and immediately into God's presence and find all the grace and help we need. Full payment has already been made for all my sin so I can enter the presence of God at any time. All that is available for me because Jesus died on a tree 2000 years ago.

The first benefit God provides for all of us through the death of Christ is payment for my sin. There's another benefit. Through His death...

2. JESUS PROVIDES THE POWER OVER SIN

I love this next phrase:

“. . .So that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.” (1 Peter 2:24b)

There's a little paradox here that I don't want you to miss... Jesus died for our sins, so that we might have the power to die to our sins.

Because of what happened on the cross, you and I have the power to live for God and do what's right. John says it like this:

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work” (1 John 3:8).

I love these words of Paul to the Colossians:

“Having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15).

And the writer of Hebrews says it like this:

“Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

Do you understand that the cross is the power over sin in my life?

Eg. Over the last couple of weeks, the media has focused attention on the tragic story of Tiger Woods. I read these words from a man named Paul Edwards about this situation.

“Prior to these recent revelations, there wasn't a man on the planet who in some sense didn't want to be Tiger Woods. Tiger is good looking... physically fit... a world-class athlete. He has a beautiful wife and two beautiful kids. He's rich beyond anyone's wildest imagination. He had a father who loved him.

Try as we may, there aren't too many men who can lay claim to all these elements of success at once. Tiger has it all. And it wasn't just handed to him. He came by his success through hard work and discipline. He earned it.

Tiger isn't as bad as he could be... But neither is he the role model he appeared to be. There isn't anything in Tiger that isn't in you... None of us are as bad as we could be, but the propensity for lust, lying, anger, and unfaithfulness are all there -hidden in a heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Our moral code can keep the Tiger in you in check for a time. The fear of getting caught is a restraint that keeps most men within the boundaries of their marriage. That discipline, that self-denial which was so characteristically on display in Tiger's athletic prowess, failed him with immeasurable consequences in his personal life. When push came to shove, Tiger had a great fall. Discipline, apparently, isn't enough.

Neither is the power of the law and the fear of getting caught enough to restrain the depravity of the human heart. Every man has an untamed Tiger within, waiting to pounce at the first sign of weakness.

Discipline and restraint are in themselves never enough to produce perfection, because all that is in us is depravity. Failure is inevitable. But failure is never final.

There is hope for overcoming failure. It isn't in you. It isn't in Tiger. It is in the cross of Jesus Christ.

When He died on the cross, He prevailed over our propensity for sin and failure. He has triumphed over every enemy poised against us for our personal destruction through His Cross!”

That's why Paul would write to the Galatians these words:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

The writer of Hebrews says it like this in Hebrews 4:

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Eg. When you think about it, a tree represents life. A tree takes carbon dioxide out of the air and replaces it with life-giving oxygen. That's what the cross does for you and me. It gives us the spiritual oxygen to live.

Every time you look at a Christmas tree, you're confronted by **the tree** on which Jesus died. You have to ask yourself, “*What am I going to do with the cross?*” Every time I see a Christmas tree, I need to remember that Jesus gave His life for me, and I'm to live my life for Him. The

cross provides power over sin. The cross provides payment for my sin. And through the cross. . .

3. **JESUS PROVIDES THE PROMISE OF WHAT'S AHEAD!**

The last phrase in this verse says it like this:

“. . .By His wounds you have been healed”
(I Peter 2:24c).

That phrase is actually a quote from these words in Isaiah:

“But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Do you understand that because of God's Christmas Tree and what happened on the cross, there is an antidote to the poison of sin? There's a cure for the sickness called “sin” that resides inside every one of us. My sin is paid for through the cross of Jesus Christ. When He breaks the power of sin in my life, there's no longer anything between God and me.

Eg. There are certain diseases that have to be quarantined because they are so contagious. Because God is a perfect God, he has to quarantine all of us who are sinners. He has to separate us from Himself because He can have nothing to do with sin.

But when we come to Jesus and place our faith in Him, the sickness called sin in us is healed. We can look forward to eternity with Him because He has cured our sin problem. Paul says it like this in Romans 5:

“Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!” (Romans 5:9).

And in Philippians, Paul writes these words:

“Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body” (Philippians 3:20,21).

CONCLUSION

1. Long before cell phones and cell towers were ever invented, communication during war occurred over phone lines that were rolled out on the battlefield.

During World War I, some British soldiers were cut off from the main forces on the front line. The communication line was severed by a mortar shell.

The captain called for a volunteer who would trace the phone line to the point of trouble and put it back together. It would be a dangerous assignment.

One man was chosen and he followed the wire into “*no man's land.*” He found one end of the wire in a shell hole, and felt around in the mud for the other end. By now, the enemy had him pinned under fire. He just lay there and held the two wires together so that communication was restored.

Before long a shell fell close to him and exploded. He was killed, yet the communication was not disturbed.

The next day after victory, they found this man frozen to death, one line locked in his right hand and the other in

his left hand. The communication line had literally passed through his body.

The British government took a picture of that man performing his duty in death and underneath it they put only one word:

“CONTACT.”

2. Do you understand that 2,000 years ago, one man came from Heaven who restored communication with God through a line that had been broken by sin? He took hold of God because He was God, and He took hold of man because he was man. He connected God and man together through His death on a tree that we call the Cross. Our contact with God was completed through Jesus Christ!

3. Do you realize Jesus never asks us to remember His birth? We make a big deal about Christmas, and we should. Nobody likes the lights, the carols, the decorations and the parties more than I do. But Jesus never asked us to remember His birth. He only asks us to remember His death. It's not His birth that saves us, it's His death!

How would you answer these questions:

- Have I received what God provides for me through Jesus?
- Have you received His payment for your sin... His power over your sin...and His promise of what is to come?

