

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

July 13, 2025

Summer Wildfires

“What Did Jesus Come to Do?”

2 Corinthians 5:18–21

Rev. Mike Fordham

Joni Eareckson Tada offers us a very simple, yet profound truth that is of the utmost importance for us to grasp. She said this, “Just think, every promise God has ever made finds its fulfillment in Jesus. God doesn’t just give us grace, He gives us Jesus, the Lord of grace. If it’s peace, it’s only found in Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Even life itself is found in the Resurrection and the Life. Christianity isn’t all that complicated ... it’s Jesus.” At the heart of Christianity, is Jesus. All of the Bible points to Jesus. Our worship here today is meant to lift up Jesus. As Christians, we live our lives for Jesus with the hopes that as we mature, we will one day be more like Jesus. Jesus has given us an abundant, new life now, and eternal life to come. It is all about Jesus. Last Wednesday evening in our Summer Wildfire series, Pastor Neal taught us about who Jesus is. This morning, we learn that our Heavenly Father sent Jesus as a free gift to fix our problem with sin and to make everything right between us and God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!” 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

GOD’S GIFT OF JESUS

The Apostle Paul first says that who Jesus is, and all that Jesus has come to do for us, is God’s gift to us. God created Adam and Eve to be the objects of His love. Did you know that God created us to love us? God created Adam and Eve and gave them the perfect life in the Garden of Eden, and they not only had a perfect relationship with each other and all of creation, but they had a perfect relationship with God. But then it all tragically came crumbling down when Adam and Eve rebelled against God. As a result of their rebellion, sin entered this world which brought conflict between humanity and creation, conflict between Adam and Eve and their children, and worst of all, conflict

between God and all humanity. God's heart was broken as Adam and Eve's rebellion made them enemies of God. God then set into motion a plan to fix the problem of sin that messed up all of God's creation and God's relationship with all of humanity. God the Father's plan was to send us a gift to fix this problem and that gift was Jesus, God in human flesh. Jesus said this about God's gift to the world in *John 3:16-17*, ¹⁶ *"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."* ¹⁷ *God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."* God didn't have to do it, but because He loves us, He took the initiative to fix what was wrong with this world through the free gift of Jesus.

John Zahl writes about an interesting gift certificate that he received. He says, "A few years ago, a friend and the owner of a local high-end department store gave me a very generous gift certificate. When I went to use the gift certificate, he met me at the store, and walked with me as I selected a sports coat, a dress shirt, and a pair of shoes. I made sure to look at each of the price tags (on the sly) so I could overshoot the gift certificate enough and put some cash back into the store's register, thereby showing my gratitude for his generosity. When I got to the register, I put my wallet on the counter and got out my credit card, but he placed the gift certificate in front of me and said, 'Well, it looks like you've only spent a little more than half of your credit with us.' I was shocked. In that moment I realized he had only been charging me half of the ticket price, which meant that I was still in his debt. In a few weeks I returned to the store with my wife determined to show my appreciation by overspending the gift card. So this time we approached the counter as a unified front, and with a huge armload of clothing and accessories. I handed our friend the gift certificate and got my wallet out. He took the gift certificate in hand and started entering the purchases into the register. Finally, when the bags were full, he turned to us and said, 'You're not going to believe this, but I've rung everything up, and the total comes to exactly zero.' We started protesting: 'That can't be right. The total should be well above what was left of our store credit.' Then he said, 'I don't think you understand how this gift certificate works. No matter what you throw at it, the total will always read zero.' We finally understood his arrangement. In our attempts to buy our way out of the debt, we had completely missed the value of the gift, which this generous man took such pleasure in bestowing upon us." Jesus is that gift from God to us that truly keeps on giving. God has given us the greatest gift of all, His love through His One and Only Son, who personally came to fix our problem of sin and a broken relationship with Him. When I reflect upon the gift of Jesus that God our Heavenly Father has so freely and generously given us, I can't help but agree with the words of *2 Corinthians 9:15* that says about Jesus, *"Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!"*

JESUS PAID THE PRICE FOR OUR SIN

At the heart of this free gift from God is that ***Jesus Paid the Price for Our Sin***. In the Old Testament God began the process of fixing the problem with sin by creating a sacrificial system. In the sacrificial system, a sinner was required to bring an innocent lamb with no spots or blemishes or defects of any kind to the priest at the temple. The

priest would slaughter the lamb and then offer it on an altar to God as a sacrifice. The lamb would symbolically take the punishment for the sins of the one who offered it and in so doing the one who offered the sacrifice would have his or her sins covered up. Later, when God came into this world through Jesus, who was fully human and fully divine, Jesus did something that no other human being has ever done; He lived a perfect life. Jesus came to live a sin-free life that since Adam and Eve; no human being has been able to do. John the Baptist said about Jesus in *John 1:29*, *"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"* John understood that Jesus was the perfect Lamb that God provided to take away all our sins once and for all like a lamb in the Old Testament sacrificial system. Then when Jesus went to the cross, it was like the Old Testament lamb being sacrificed on the altar, except Jesus' altar was a cross. *Isaiah 53:4-6* says that this is what Jesus, the Lamb of God, did for us through His suffering and death on the cross, *"⁴ Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! ⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all."* Jesus suffered and died in our place on the cross. Jesus became the perfect offering for our sins. Jesus paid the price for our sins by offering His perfect life for us on the cross. *1 Timothy 2:5-6* says, *"⁵ For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time."*

Why was Jesus' life the payment for us to be forgiven of our sins? Pastor and author J.D. Greear writes: "I remember a Muslim asking me when I lived in Southeast Asia, why would God need somebody to die in order to forgive our sin? He said, 'If you sinned against me, and I wanted to forgive you, I wouldn't make you kill your dog before I forgave you. Why would God require some kind of sacrifice to forgive?' Here's how I answered him: Choosing to forgive somebody means that you are agreeing to absorb the cost of the injustice of what they've done. Imagine you stole my car and you wrecked it, and you don't have insurance, and or the money, to pay for it. What are my choices? I could make you pay. I could haul you before a judge and request a court-mandated payment plan. If you were foolish enough to steal my \$1.5 million Ferrari (No, I do not actually own a Ferrari), you might never pay it off, and you'd always be in my debt. But I have another choice. I could forgive you What am I choosing to do if I say, 'I forgive you'? I'm choosing to absorb the cost of your wrong. I'll have to pay the price of having the car fixed. ... You have no debt to pay—not because there was nothing to pay, but because I paid it all. Not only that, I'm choosing to absorb the pain of your treatment of me. ... I'm choosing to give you friendship and acceptance even though you deserve the opposite. This is always how forgiveness works. It comes at a cost. If you forgive someone, you bear the cost rather than insisting that the wrongdoer does. And that is what Jesus, the Mighty God, was doing when he came to earth and lived as a man and died a criminal's death on a wooden cross." What an amazing gift

that God has given us in Jesus who because of His perfect life and death on the cross as Paul says in *2 Corinthians 5:19*, God no longer counts our sins against us.

JESUS MAKES US RIGHT WITH GOD

Now that our sins are forgiven through Jesus paying the price for our sins, we then can experience the next aspect of God's gift to us and that is that ***Jesus Makes Us Right with God***. The ultimate objective of Jesus coming into this world, and the reason why Jesus forgave our sins, is so that we could be made right with God. *Colossians 1:19-20*, ¹⁹*"For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ,* ²⁰*and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross."* Jesus was sent by God into this world to personally invite us back into a relationship with God. Jesus tore down the wall of hostility, the wall of sin, between us and God so that we could have a relationship with God. We can now stand before God as if we have never sinned, even as if we have lived a perfect life like Jesus did. As Paul says here in *2 Corinthians 5:21*, *"For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."*

A great example of God sending Jesus into this world to personally to make things right with us and invite us back into a relationship with God is found in a movie called *The Straight Story*. The move is based on the true story of Alvin Straight, a 73-year-old man who embarked upon a pilgrimage to mend a broken relationship with his brother, Lyle, whom he hadn't seen or spoken to in over 10 years. When Alvin Straight learns that Lyle has had a stroke, he determines to visit him and make things right. Alvin hitches a makeshift trailer to his 1966 John Deere riding lawn mower and sets out on a 250-mile trip even though he is legally blind and doesn't have a driver's license. He camps out in fields and backyards made available by hospitable people he meets along the way. Slowly but surely, Alvin perseveres and reaches his brother. He steers his riding mower down a dirt road and finds a run-down wooden shack. Alvin climbs off the mower, shuffles slowly toward the house, and calls out, "Lyle! Lyle!" There is no response. The look on Alvin's furrowed face gives evidence to his fear: perhaps he's too late, maybe Lyle has died in the six weeks since he began his journey. After a lengthy pause, a voice from inside the shack calls, "Alvin? Alvin?" Lyle appears at the front door holding onto a walker. He invites Alvin to come onto the porch, where they silently sit. Alvin nervously looks at his brother, while Lyle studies the riding mower and makeshift trailer. Obviously overcome with emotion and gratitude, his eyes puddle as he asks, "You came all this way on that just to see me?" Alvin's face twitches, betraying his emotion. His eyes, too, are tearful. He smiles and simply says, "Yep!" Lyle's face speaks for his heart: he is humbled by his brother's grace. Nothing could keep Alvin from reconciling with his brother, Lyle and nothing could keep God from making a way to reconcile with us. God even went so far as to send His One and Only Son to become one of us, suffer and die for us so that we can be reunited with God.

Romans 5:6-11 gives us a great summary of what God has given us through the gift of Jesus. It says, ⁶*"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and*

died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. ¹⁰ For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. ¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."

While we were running away from God, God was pursuing us through Jesus to make things right with us. Even though God had done nothing wrong to us to cause the rift in our relationship with Him, God personally came to us to pay the price to get rid of our sin and to make things right with God. All this is meaningless if we do not accept God's free gift of love in Jesus that offers to forgive us and bring us back into relationship with Him. Have you accepted God's gift through Jesus? It is yours for the asking.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *The Holy Bible* (Several FREE copies are available in the DRC)
- *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott
- *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All*, Charles R. Swindoll

Icebreaker I – What's the most memorable or meaningful gift you've ever received, and why?

Icebreaker II – If you could have dinner with Jesus today, what's one question you would ask Him?

1. Why do you think we struggle to understand grace as a "free gift"? How does the department store gift certificate story help illustrate our misunderstandings?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–21. What does it mean to you personally that God made Jesus "who knew no sin to be sin for us"?
3. How does the idea of God absorbing the cost of our sin, as in the "wrecked car" analogy, challenge or clarify your understanding of forgiveness?
4. In what ways are you tempted to try to earn God's forgiveness or approval, instead of simply receiving His gift?
5. What does reconciliation with God look like in your daily life? How might it also affect your relationships with others?
6. What impacted you most from the sermon? How might you apply this week's sermon to your life?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?