

Behold the Cross

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[0 : 00] If you're new to church this morning, my name's Josh. It's lovely to have you. Let me add my welcome to what Shem's already said. And it's always great to see family and brothers and sisters. It's good to be here with you and we'll dive into God's word together again.

On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. And on that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness. And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, you shall not live for you speak lies in the name of the Lord.

And his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day, every prophet will be ashamed of his vision. When he prophesies, he will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive, but he will say, I am no prophet, I am a worker of the soil, for a man sold me in my youth.

And if one asks him, what are these wounds on your back? He'll say, the wounds I received in the house of my friends. Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts.

[1 : 19] Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, declares the Lord, two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive.

And I will put this third into the fire and refine them as one refines silver and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, they are my people. And they will say, the Lord is my God. Well, friends, how much do you hate sin? There's an old joke about preachers.

I don't know if you've heard this one. Apparently, some bloke, I'm sure he wasn't at this church, upon returning home from church, was asked by his wife what the sermon was about. He replied, sin.

Not satisfied with the answer, the wife asked, well, what did the preacher have to say about sin? And the man responded, he's against it. Now, it's a bit stupid.

[2 : 23] Maybe you had to be there. But it introduces well for us, I think, how familiar we are with this old topic. And the danger of being all too comfortable and bored with it.

I mean, if I ask the question, how much do you hate sin? And you say, well, really, really, really, I'm dead against it. And then we all go home, well, that's probably not going to do any of us much good, is it?

But I think one of our kind of core theological convictions as evangelicals, which is gospel people, Bible-believing people, is that none of us really hate our sin enough.

You see, because it's one of those things about sin that sin blinds us to its own seriousness and its own presence. So that often, the more sinful you are, the less sinful you feel.

And the more righteous you are, the more sensitive and conscious of your sin you become. Now, that being the case, the first thing I want to do this morning is just to try and lead us again in thinking about our sin, looking at it square in the face, and hopefully, we get a bit more of a glimpse of how ugly it is, how damaging and shameful it is, so that we can remember, this week and beyond, that we really, really, really ought to hate it.

[3 : 52] So I want to warn you, your sin is going to try and hide from you this morning. Let me just tell you right up front that I want you to try and hunt it down and seek it out.

Think about how terribly perverse you are, how deep your sin goes, how infuriatingly intractable the problem is. So that's step number one in our strategy this morning.

But then secondly, of course, I should say, I have another aim this morning, which is that once we've glimpsed our sin as deeply as we can, then I want us to turn to this passage and see and feel the relief offered in this passage, that in our Lord Jesus Christ, at His cross, there is cleansing, there is freedom from sin.

Does that make sense? So if I can put it like this, I want us to look sin squarely in the face, first of all, without shrinking or pretending or downplaying it or becoming overwhelmed with grief because in the end, sin is not inescapable, it's not inevitable.

We don't have to let sin have the last word in our lives. There really is forgiveness, cleansing and the power to change in the Lord Jesus Christ even now, even this week, no matter how depraved or stuck you find yourself in sin at the moment.

[5 : 27] All right, so first, first let's talk about sin. I don't know if Roy nicked this illustration from someone, stole it, I should say, Roy, if you're thinking about your sins. No, that's just a joke, but I'm stealing it from him.

We tend to think of sin like dirt on our clothes, like we'd like to be rid of it, yes, but it's not necessarily urgent. You know, it's less than ideal, but in some ways, we can sort of get fairly comfortable with it, we can bear it.

But God thinks of sin more like dirt in his eyes. It's deeply offensive and painful. It requires urgent, decisive action. The prophet Habakkuk famously says to God, your eyes are too pure to look upon evil.

You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So the first reason to hate sin and the first thing that will help us to hate sin as we ought is to see our sin the way God does.

God really hates sin. Our creator, our ruler and sustainer is holy, holy, holy. God is pure light and in him is no darkness at all.

[6 : 41] No compromise or corruption. There are no shadowy bits or gray areas. God is not just a little bit saddened and disappointed by our sin. No, he is profoundly outraged by it.

Psalms 5:5 says, God hates the workers of iniquity. And my mom actually got converted because of that verse when she realized it doesn't just say God hates the works of iniquity, but God hates the workers.

What a terrifying thought. God is profoundly outraged by sinners. So this, of course, is closely related to the doctrine of hell. Remember in Matthew's gospel, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.

For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body goes into hell.

Now, that is a confronting passage, isn't it? And interestingly, it's actually one of those few passages that is repeated verbatim. So it's in the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of Matthew.

[7 : 58] Jesus repeats himself absolutely verbatim in Matthew chapter 18. So he wasn't shy about saying this kind of thing, was he? Now, he is not, of course, explaining the solution to our sin.

Right? That you just have to cut off enough limbs and you'll be rid of it. Because the problem with sin, again, that he himself explains, is that sin starts in the heart. Sin lies at the very center of each of us.

So no amount of lopping off limbs is ever going to solve it for us. But what Jesus is saying in the most vivid terms is that if it was your right eye that was causing you to sin, or your right hand, then you would surely just tear it out and throw it away.

That would be a fantastic, obvious, no-brainer solution. The cost-benefit analysis would be easy. Because sin really is that despicable and disgusting, and hell is something so terrifying that there is nothing so precious that it wouldn't be worth sacrificing.

Jesus is encouraging us to do anything to get rid of sin. Now, before we go too much further, I think it's worth clarifying, just quickly, the difference between sin and sins.

[9 : 15] Right? Many of you will know this, but some of you might not. Sin is like the disease. Sins are the symptoms. Right? In 1 John 3, verse 4, John tells us that sin, capital S, sin, is lawlessness.

That is, it's this fundamental attitude towards God and His rule that lurks in our hearts. It hides in there, as it were. It says we'd all rather have, we'd all rather not live under God's rule, but live as outlaws.

We'd rather go our own way. So again, to borrow from others, sin is not so much about law-breaking, as law-making. And it's about my determination to be the lawmaker.

I want to live as an outlaw rather than to live under God's law. Sins, on the other hand, are instances of law-breaking, of breaking God's laws.

Right? They are specific instances of going our own way. Like God doesn't want us to murder, but we still do. God doesn't want us to lie or steal, but we still do. Now sometimes theologians have kind of distinguished even further into sins of commission and sins of omission.

[10:37] Right? Which is to say, there are things that we should do, or sorry, there are things that we shouldn't do, but we do do. And then there are things that we don't do that we should do.

I'll try and say that really fast. But we've already talked about kind of murder, lying, stealing. God doesn't want us to do those things, but we still do. But then of course, God does want us to be kind to other people, to be generous and loving, to serve.

Jesus said, do to others as you would have them do to you. You remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is saying, we have the opportunity and we are expected, in order to be perfect, we are expected to love self-sacrificially every person we meet all the time.

But we neglect all of these things and all of these opportunities, don't we? Because of our selfishness, our lack of compassion, these are sins of omission. Now, describing sin as a disease and sins as the symptoms also, I think, helps us to understand something of the visceral hatred we should feel for it.

I mean, no one wants to be diseased, do they? I wonder if we could see sins dripping off us like pus or growing on us like tumors, maybe then we'd start to get the picture that there's something deeply wrong with us.

[12:13] Right. But somehow, because you can't see arrogance exactly or see the scars left behind by an unkind word, sometimes it can feel as if sin isn't really there doing great damage.

But it's only when we see how viscerally disgusting it is that we're really able to start killing it off and taking it seriously. See, if you want to deal with sin in your life and pick something in your life, I'm not sure what it might be for you, it's not enough just to try and grit your teeth and deal with your behaviors by sheer willpower.

I mean, that's part of it. There's something to that. Sin is like an addiction. Part of it is physiological. So, I often think about this in the context of pornography.

If you are in the habit of looking at pornography, the best thing you can do straight away is just to stop. Kill off that behavior in any way you can.

Like, get a dumb phone, don't have the internet in your house, work in public spaces, confess to someone and get them to hold you accountable, all those kinds of things. If you can just stop, if you can just be vicious and brutal and decisive about cutting out that behavior, then you know that like, or you should know, that physiologically you will start to change.

[13:41] You know, neurologically your brain will start to heal. Like, you're coming out of an addiction, your addiction will fade, just as if you were getting off nicotine or something like that. But dealing with your behavior in that way will only ever last for a little while.

And that's not the end of the fight. See, what you're really aiming for is a deep down change in your affections and desires so that sinning no longer becomes attractive, it becomes repulsive.

You're not just kind of staying within the guardrails of what you know is right and wrong, you understand how ugly it would be to wander outside of them. So, in 2 Peter chapter 2 for instance, I find this one of the most helpful verses.

I'll pick it up in verse 20. Peter says, For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first, for it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

What the true proverb says has happened to them, the dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire. Now, the line that really sticks out for me is that one about the dog returning to its vomit.

[15:14] vomit. And I don't know about you, but I do not find myself tempted to lick up vomit. And I am not struggling with craving vomit.

I don't lie awake at night fighting off this temptation. I don't need help. I don't need reminders to stay away from vomit. I don't need accountability partners or covenant eyes.

Because I see vomit for what it is. It is disgusting. It is hideous to look at. It has a foul odour. It tastes revolting. And what Peter is saying is that sin is really like that.

If only we could see it for what it really is. If we could smell it, we wouldn't be drawn to it. We wouldn't be daydreaming about it. We wouldn't be thinking it was naughty but a little bit fun to do it. We would just hate it. We would hate the smell of it, the sight of it, the touch of it, the taste of it. So, imagine if your ears were so righteous, so attuned to truth and love, that lies and juicy gossip just felt like vomit being poured into your ears.

[16:26] You see what I mean? Can you feel it? If you've got a vivid enough imagination? It's disgusting, isn't it? But instead, so often, sin feels a bit more like eating chocolate or ice cream, doesn't it?

It's something that we know is bad for us but it tastes so good. Sin is a guilty pleasure. Proverbs 26, 22 says, the words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels.

They go down into the inner parts of the body. Or Proverbs 5, verse 3 says, for the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil.

But in the end, she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. You see, that's the problem with sin, isn't it? With all sin, we are so easily fooled by a thin veneer of pleasure that we are constantly drinking bitter poison.

We're constantly damaging and destroying ourselves in the hopes of finding happiness in life. So, do you want to be rid of sin? Brothers and sisters, do you hate it?

[17:35] And I don't know if there are any people here this morning who don't yet know the Lord Jesus as their Lord and their Savior, but maybe you've come and you're just interested in what Jesus was on about.

Well, then I think the same question applies to you. Do you hate your sin? Do you want to be free of it? Are you sick of living in the vomit?

because you have come to the right place? Because what the Bible teaches us is that Jesus is the only way to escape sin.

And the good news is that he has big open arms. He is ready to welcome all who come to him. In Mark chapter 2, there's a lovely scene where Mark tells us, Jesus reclined at table in his house, not his house, but Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

For there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? And when Jesus heard of it, he said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

[18:54] You see, sin is a terrible disease, but Jesus is a fantastic doctor. And he wants to hang out with sick people. He's happy to deal with all the pus and the tumors that are hanging off us.

All right, so let's return to Zechariah then, and see what Zechariah teaches us about all of this. Now, last week, if you remember, when we looked at chapter 12, the key phrase that kept getting repeated was, on that day, on that day, on that day.

Do you remember that, if you were here? So, what Zechariah is being given in these last few chapters are various snapshots about a particular day in the future when God will gather all the nations to Jerusalem, and we learn that they would come to lay siege to her and destroy her, but that on that day, in fact, God would turn Jerusalem into an unconquerable city and would unleash his wrath upon all the nations through her.

And we talked about how Jesus, in the first place, is that unconquerable city. He was besieged at the cross. The cross was a profound moment of weakness and vulnerability, and yet at the very same time of great strength and victory when Jesus conquered all our enemies.

Now, in Jesus, we too are the unconquerable city. And in some ways, in these last days, we are still under siege, aren't we? And we are still waiting for the ultimate victory at the end of the age.

[20:26] So even though the cross was that day, Zachariah was looking forward to in one sense, actually, we are still living on that day in another sense, and we're still waiting for the last day of the

on that day period, okay, in another sense.

If that gets a bit confusing, don't worry. But maybe talk to someone about it afterwards. Someone once described Old Testament prophecies to me like looking at a mountain range from afar. If you can imagine looking at a mountain range on the horizon, you might see three or four peaks that all look like they're right next to each other.

But as you get closer, you start to realize there's a lot more depth to the scene, and that some of these peaks are actually miles and miles apart. Well, it's not a perfect illustration, but I think sometimes it's helpful to imagine the Old Testament prophecies a bit like that.

Zachariah is talking about all of these things happening on that day. But by the time we get to the New Testament, we see that that day is kind of stretched across 2,000 years in a sense.

All of these things are happening in multiple fulfillments. So, anyway, last week, Zachariah was also given another snapshot about what would happen on that day, something like the great battle in the Valley of Megiddo when Josiah was killed.

[21 : 45] on that day, Israel's king would again be pierced, and God would pour out a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy so that his people would finally respond to their sin with true repentance and grief and mourning.

And that's why we need to start this chapter, I think, with a clear sense of the horror of our sin. And actually, not just by looking at the sin in our own lives, but by looking at the cross, which is why the reading from Matthew 27 was so helpful this morning, wasn't it?

Because the cross is where we really see the true ugliness of sin in all of its fullness. We are all, in some measure, responsible for the cross.

Now, I know we didn't take the 30 pieces of silver, and we didn't hammer in the nails, but the Jews and Gentiles there, involved in Jesus' death, are there to represent all of us.

And Jesus, hanging there, to deal with our sins. In that sense, we need to remember that we put him there. We've just been singing.

[22 : 52] Behold the man upon a cross, my sin upon his shoulders. Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers. It was my sin that held him there, until it was accomplished.

His dying breath has brought me life. I know that it is finished. So, until we realize, actually, that Jesus died because of me, because of my sins, we'll never be able to grasp the good news of the cross, and enjoy the new life, and the freedom from our sins that we long for.

Okay, now, verse one. Zechariah 13, verse one. On that day, there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Notice how the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem there, that lines up with what we said, what was said in chapter 12, verse 10, about those who would mourn. So, the point is that the cleansing being offered is not automatically flowing to every person on the planet.

Now, it's cleansing for those who mourn, for those who repent, for those God has poured out his spirit upon, so they can see the horror of their sin in the cross.

[24 : 12] Now, again, Zechariah is riffing on another Old Testament prophet who preceded him. Here, the language is very reminiscent of Ezekiel 36. In Ezekiel 36, 25, God promised a day when he said, I will sprinkle clean water on you.

And you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain, and make it abundant, and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations.

Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord God.

[25 : 17] Let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel. You see the various themes that are clustering together again. Cleansing, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, hatred of sin, and even self-loathing.

That's something our society will not accept. But God wants self-loathing among his people that then leads to true repentance. We don't have to wallow and remain in the self-loathing, but it's like a train station.

You don't have to stop at it, but you have to go through it. It brings us to true repentance. Again, this all points us to the cross. In fact, in John chapter 19, when Jesus' side is pierced, and the water and the blood flow out, I think on the one hand, that is medical confirmation for the Romans that he's really dead, but it's also an important theological point, a symbol that John is using, and he's picking up on these passages from Ezekiel and Zechariah, saying that in this moment, you see, a fountain was opened.

The only way to be cleansed from your sin is to be showered in the death of Jesus. Not literally, of course. Again, it's not about the fact that you needed to be there standing underneath him, but what matters is that God has poured out his Holy Spirit upon you such that you mourn and repent over your sin, and you plead with him for mercy and for the cleansing that only Jesus' death can provide. And again, there's a lovely old hymn that captures this. We're going to sing afterwards. There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

[27 : 13] The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day, and there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.

Dear dying lamb, thy precious blood shall never lose its power till all the ransomed ones of God be saved to sin no more. Ere since by faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply, redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.

When this poor lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave, then in a nobler, sweeter song I'll sing thy power to save.

It's a beautiful hymn, isn't it? About Jesus, the mighty fountain who washes us with the water and the blood that flowed from his side. Which is to say that his death washes us, and we embrace his death by faith.

When the Holy Spirit fills us, he teaches us first to loathe ourselves, to do it to ourselves, and to cry out to God for mercy. And then he teaches us to trust simply in Jesus' power and willingness to save us through his death on the cross.

[28 : 34] Now in verse 2 then, still riffing on Ezekiel, you see, Zechariah goes next to talk about idols and false prophets. And on that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more.

And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness. And if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, you shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord, and his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies.

And you see how these two things are intertwined, idolatry and false prophecy. And specifically, Moses commanded in Deuteronomy chapter 13, that the Israelites should have no pity upon false prophets, who lead the people astray to idolatry, and even their nearest and dearest kin, their parents, should execute them.

So now what Zechariah is saying is that on that day, finally the Israelites will have the law written on their hearts, won't they? They will reject idolatry.

They will choose to worship God faithfully, even above their own sons and daughters. Now in the New Testament, Jesus picks up on these themes, of course, and he applies them to us. Crucially, he doesn't expect his followers to take up the sword or the stone and punish false teachers in their midst with execution.

[30 : 01] In the Old Testament, just to be slightly simplistic about this maybe, but the church and the state were the same thing, right? Israel was a spiritual and a civic reality, but in the New Testament, the church and the state are quite separate entities.

The church does not have authority to wield the sword against anyone, including idolaters. Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world. Nevertheless, Jesus applies this prophecy by teaching us, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

And likewise, Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, but now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one.

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

So that is what it looks like in the New Testament to cut off the evil person. It looks like excommunication, withdrawal of fellowship, a refusal to even eat with such a person until they repent.

[31 : 29] He's not talking about how we should treat unbelievers. He's talking about how we should treat those who claim to be brothers and yet refuse to live with Jesus as their Lord truly.

Church leaders, of course, are to lead the way in this. But in the end, it is the responsibility of the whole church. We are all expected to withdraw fellowship and love and friendship from those who claim to be believers but live as unbelievers.

From those who say with their lips that Jesus is Lord but don't live that out day to day. And just as Moses and Zechariah said, we are not to show partiality even to our nearest and dearest kin.

Now verse 4, on that day, every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies. He will not put on a hairy cloak in order to deceive but he will say, I'm no prophet, I'm a worker of the soil for a man sold me in my youth.

And if one asks him, what are these wounds on your back? He will say, the wounds I received in the house of my friends. Now some of the imagery in this section is probably fairly unfamiliar to us, the hairy cloak and the wounds.

[32 : 41] But these are all trademarks of being a prophet in the Old Testament, specifically a false prophet. Remember Elijah used to wear that hairy cloak, that's how everyone spotted him. And the false prophets in 1 Kings chapter 18, the prophets of Baal are the ones who cut themselves with swords and lances and they give themselves wounds to try and call upon Baal.

So the point here is that on that day, the false prophets are going to hide and flee. They're going to be ashamed of their former lives and afraid of being discovered.

It doesn't look like they're going to repent exactly. I mean, after all, they're still lying. They don't come clean in Zechariah's prophecy. But I think the point is that finally the truth is going to reign in the public square and so the false prophets are going to run for cover.

But finally in verse 7 we come to an obviously distinct portion of the chapter. It's not introduced with the typical on that day opening although it's still clearly talking about that day.

And it reminds us of the worthless shepherd God addressed back in chapter 11 if you remember. When the people rejected God as their shepherd, God said he would raise up a wicked and cruel shepherd to rule over them and then he would strike that shepherd on the arm and wither that shepherd blinding his right eye and so on.

[34 : 04] We talked about how that verse gives us a glimmer of hope because it's a word of judgment against this wicked shepherd that meant God mustn't entirely have given up on his sheep. But now in this chapter we meet a very different kind of shepherd who is still going to face judgment.

See, in verse 7 God calls him my shepherd. In other words he's not a worthless shepherd like the other one was. And he's also described crucially as the man who stands next to me.

The man who stands next to me. Now, it's been a little while now but this should remind us of the first half of the book when back in chapter 4 there were two olive trees and they were described as the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

And if you remember what that image was all about it was about Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the Davidic king effectively bringing restoration and renewal to the whole nation through the rebuilding of the temple.

Then in chapter 6 we saw that these two officers are going to be combined into one. Zechariah was told to place a royal crown on Joshua's head symbolizing that a man would come called the branch who would be both a priest and king in the line of David.

[35 : 29] So he would be the man who stands next to the Lord of all the earth. In other words that's the shepherd we are looking at now. Some commentators have called this the Isaiah 53 of Zechariah.

Take a look at what the Lord does to him. The Lord of hosts first speaks a word to his sword and he says Awake O sword against my shepherd against the man who stands next to me.

Isaiah wrote Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by God and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our

iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. It was the will of the Lord to crush him he has put him to grief.

So this is the shepherd who was pierced by us back in chapter 12 we mourn the cross as a moment that shows up the horror of our sin we pierced God but on top of that it's also true to say that God pierced God God pierced God for our transgressions God the Lord of hosts commanded his own sword to strike the son the priestly king he said strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered he said I will turn my hand against the little ones in the whole land declares the Lord two thirds shall be cut off and perish and one third shall be kept alive and I will put this third into the fire and refine them as one refines silver and test them as gold is tested they will call upon my name and I will answer them I will say they are my people and they will say the Lord is my God so there are four parts to this little bit briefly first the shepherd is struck and the sheep are scattered and obviously without their protector and guide the sheep are vulnerable next the Lord turns his attention to them two thirds of the sheep are killed one third is spared this is not meant to be exact arithmetic but it is an indication that the majority of them are destroyed one third survives this is what Isaiah and Jeremiah would call the remnant or the leftovers so now Zechariah is promising a band of survivors a remnant who will not be killed on that day but thirdly they will be tested they will have to endure fire the fire of God's wrath and this fire will refine them and purify them it will purge them of sin and this is really important for us to think about notice that the fire will cleanse them in other words you can't have salvation from sin without the fire of judgment which really does press the point home doesn't it how much do you hate sin how much do you want to be rid of it enough to endure the fire of purification then Zechariah says they will call upon my name and I will answer them

[38 : 45] I will say they are my people and they will say the Lord is my God so finally we reach the climax the goal of it all of the judgment of the cleansing fire the goal of it all is that we reach this restored relationship with God the covenant is re-established God's people are embracing and enjoying his rule and God is embracing them as his people to put it in New Testament terms verse 9 describes people embracing the gospel doesn't it the Lord is my God Yahweh is my God that's what becoming a Christian is really about saying Jesus is my Lord Jesus is my God he is the one I acknowledge has the right to rule over me and I love his rule I want him to rule me because the cross has finally set us free from the distortions and lies about God that our sins make us believe we no longer want to throw off the rule of God we embrace it alright so time for me to finish up

I told you my two aims at the top didn't I so let me close with those my strategy this morning if you like was first to try and get us to think about our sin because context context context the only way into chapter 13 is through chapter 12 sounds rather obvious but the only way into the cleansing and relief of chapter 13 is through the grief over our sin that we're supposed to feel at the end of chapter 12 if you don't realize that you're a sinner and you don't realize how bad it is to be stuck in the filth of your sin and you don't realize that without Jesus you'll always be stuck swimming in filth then you'll never see how good this passage is so step one's really important but then secondly having beheld our sin a little more clearly the next thing I wanted to do this morning and that we should do every day is to behold the cross try and behold the cross more clearly and ask God to impress the cross upon your heart because when he does by the power of the

Holy Spirit the cross does that mighty work in your heart of freeing you from your sin see the cross doesn't just put us legally in the right with God although it does do that that's true and very important but even more than that the cross has real power to cleanse us and to transform us from the heart this work will not be complete until the very last day but it does begin in Christians now because in some sense we already live on that day the cross is where the fountain of cleansing was opened the cross has the power to vanquish the false prophets and the idols we have followed to free us from their power the cross has the power to teach us to love God and his law in a way that it was just not possible for people under the old covenant the cross is where the good shepherd was struck for his sheep

Jesus quoted from Zechariah 13 on the night he was betrayed he said you will all fall away because of me this night for it is written I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered that's Matthew chapter 26 this means too that the cross has begun the time of refining judgment for the household of God for the one third the remnant of God's people we won't go there now but the apostle Peter talks about how Christian suffering is refining our faith like a fire refines gold so that

we are purified by it the judgment has begun at the household of God the suffering we go through is meant to mould us and shape us into the likeness of Jesus so when you behold the cross at first it will make you hate yourself it should do it will make you want to die to yourself your old self but then it revives us it gives us a new self it teaches us that we are precious to God that you can find cleansing at the cross and a fresh start in a new relationship with God you can now live finally free from your sin you can love God and his law again just as you were made to do let's pray almighty God we beg you to impress upon our hearts the horrors of our sin but then overwhelm us with the love and mercy and grace displayed at the cross help us to treasure our Lord Jesus and his work for us more and more each day and right now in real practical ways we pray that you would set us free from our sins help us to be serious about them and keep killing them off and transform us more into the likeness of Jesus so that we can be more and more like the people we were made to be and the people we will be for all eternity in his presence we pray these things in Jesus name Amen