

Christ Suitable

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[0 : 00] Now, tonight I'm going to look at both of the passages that we read, those two passages, but first of all, we're going to be in Matthew chapter 5.

I hope it's not confusing, flicking between, well, we're not going to flick between the two, we're going to look at one and then the other. I hope that's not too much. But as I said, we're in this theme of thinking about the work of Jesus.

Now, what was the work of Jesus? Why did he come? Well, he came to be our Savior. That's a basic, isn't it?

We know that about the work of Jesus. Then the question is, you might say to people who you meet, I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus, he's my Savior. If you get that far in the conversation and they say, what does that mean?

Jesus is your Savior. I don't think I need a Savior. So what do you mean, saved from what? We need a Savior. If we're to ask the question, what kind of Savior?

[1 : 01] What kind of Savior is Jesus? We need one who's appropriate, or as the title of the edicts put for the sermon tonight, a suitable Savior. In other words, we need somebody who's able to save us from our problem.

And of course, the problem we have, the Bible presents to us, the unfashionable messages that we have nowadays, is that we have rebellion between ourselves and our Maker, God, because of sin. So there's that distinct problem that you and I have that we need healed from. We need that relationship restored. Jesus came to be a suitable Savior, Redeemer, so that that problem is fixed, so that you can have a relationship tonight with God, that you can know that your sins are forgiven. And that's very important for you tonight, isn't it, to know that your sins are forgiven, not to hope that your sins are forgiven, not to just have a wishful thinking, to have that sense that he is a suitable and a sufficient Savior.

Now you know, just to illustrate this a little bit, we probably all know the experience, unless you're particularly privileged. We all know that experience of being a child, and you've been saving up your pocket money for something.

[2 : 16] And there's something in particular you want, and you go with your parent or whoever to a shop, and you see the thing that you want, and they have to break the bad news to you, that you can't afford it.

You haven't saved up enough. There's not enough in the tin. You can't pay for it. So in other words, you haven't got sufficient money to pay for the thing that you want.

Your funds are insufficient. Now the Bible describes the salvation that we have as being purchased, as being bought by the work that Jesus did.

In Acts chapter 20, it says, the instruction is given, be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. That's a really striking thing to say.

That's the kind of thing that if you said to your friends, again if they were asking you about your faith and about what you believed, it would probably jar with them. He bought salvation with his blood.

[3 : 13] That's a really striking thing to say. But that's the message that the Bible has. At the heart of what Jesus did. So of course what that presumes is that appropriate payment for sin has to be made.

We maybe think we know that, but it's important to just establish that, isn't it? In other words, the problem of sin can't just be brushed away. God doesn't just say it doesn't matter.

Just move on. Do your best. That payment for sin needs to be made. God is the one who decides that, and he's the one to whom it needs to be made.

This has always been the case, hasn't it? All the way through the Bible. You recognise that you go back into the Old Testament, right back into the early pages of the Bible and the Old Testament. You see that in the sacrificial system.

The elaborate way in which the Israelites, God's people, had to make sacrifice for the things that they'd done that separated them from God. They had to make these sacrifices.

[4 : 14] But crucially, if you think about something like the Passover sacrifice, do you remember a particular distinctive of the Lamb that would have had to be brought, the sacrifice that had to be brought, was that it was spotless, that it was pure.

And we often have that sense when we read about the sacrifices, that they were to be spotless, that they were to be pure. Now that can point simply to the fact that they were to be good, that they were to be of the best, as it were, the best kind of sacrifice.

But equally, what this does is it points forward. When we think about that early sacrifice that was made, that in and of itself could never satisfy the payment that had to be made, these sacrifices always pointed forward, and they pointed forward to Jesus.

And that's what we're going to see in the work of Jesus. This becomes the perfect sacrifice, the one who's perfectly appropriate, suitable for the payment that needs to be made.

In 1 Peter, it says this, you were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. So that really close link there between the work of Jesus and all that he attained when he did on the cross, and going way back into that whole idea of the sacrifice that had to be spotless, it had to be pure.

[5 : 37] So this is the big picture of what we're thinking about, the work of Jesus. And we get to this point where we're thinking just now about the suitability of Jesus to be the appropriate sacrifice.

Now that's kind of, it's the sort of thing that you can't really avoid when we, all the time when we've been looking at the person and the work of Jesus, you can't really get away from the fact that he's a perfect person.

We see that all the way through his life. You can't get away from the obedience of Jesus, which really underpins what we're looking at tonight, the fact that he was perfectly obedient all the way through his life.

And so really that's what we're going to bring out tonight. That's what I want to focus on in a couple of particular, a couple of ways. Because Jesus of course, if you think about it, he came as one who was perfect.

When Jesus was born, because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, he didn't have the problem that you and I have. We're born as sinful people. We inherit that problem right from the first man, the problem of sin.

[6 : 39] The Jesus didn't have that. But not only was he born sinless, he had to live his life sinlessly. You know that the phrase, he learned obedience through his suffering, through all that he went through, all that he chose to come and go through in what he worked out as he lived among us all those years ago.

He lived out perfect obedience. And that was his life. And so we're going to look at that. I'm going to bring out how we see that. How do we see the obedience of Jesus, which makes him a perfect and a suitable saviour?

People speak about the obedience of Jesus in two ways, as an act of obedience and as a passive obedience. And that's just simply what I want to do. Two points really, and so those two passages, that's how we're going to focus on this tonight.

So the first thing is in Matthew chapter 5, and that has to do with the active obedience of Jesus. What did Jesus do that meant that his life was a life of obedience?

In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus is teaching. We get these wonderful words. They may be very well known to you. They're familiar because their words are very important to his church because they describe in many ways what it looks like to agree with, to assent to life in the kingdom.

[8 : 06] So if you're somebody who says, Jesus is my Lord, if you're somebody who acknowledges that you want the rule of God to be your rule, to be somebody who follows God, then Jesus is describing the kind of life that that looks like.

It's challenging, as we'll see, and it was very challenging to the religious community that he was living amongst even in his day. But I want to see what Jesus says about the way that he fulfills all righteousness in this passage.

What's Jesus saying here? Because it's more than just an accumulation of good things. So again, going back to the people that you know who are Christians, they maybe think that by you saying I'm a Christian, you're saying, well, I think it's important to just do good things to be a good person. Now that may be confusing to people who aren't Christians because they might think, well, I also think it's good to do good things. So what's the difference? But the point that Jesus is also that we can see from here that he's bringing out is that this isn't just an accumulation of good practice, but it's also about his or the person he's speaking about here, and equally his own heart is completely attuned to this way of life.

Jesus was perfectly, he perfectly desired to do the will of God. He perfectly willed to follow the God's way all the way through his life.

[9 : 31] So a few things from this week's passage. First of all, see in verse 17. Jesus never comes to bring in a kind of new standard.

Jesus doesn't come along and say, okay, here's something completely different. This is what you've been waiting for. He says in verse 17, don't think I've come to abolish the law of the prophets. I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

At every point, what Jesus does and what Jesus says and what he teaches accords with all that's come before. All the laws and the teaching of the prophets, all of this Jesus ascends to and he agrees with it.

Those people who tried to find fault with Jesus, they tried to pick him up on aspects of his life that they saw as inconsistent or whatever it was, they couldn't do it. Nobody could ever point to something in Jesus's life and say there's a sin.

You know that as it were, the pressure built as we get closer to the cross, the clamour is because he claims to be a blasphemer.

[10 : 39] Nobody can ever pick up Jesus because of a particular sin and so he's completely consistent. At this point, as he's teaching, he completely ascends to all of the laws of God.

Jesus also, and I'm not going to go into this in detail, Jesus also, as I've just touched on really, makes this a matter of the heart because his teaching here is so challenging, isn't it?

Now he's speaking into a community, if you think about maybe the Pharisees and the kind of people in the religious community, he's speaking into a community who thought, a lot of them thought, anyway I don't want to just kind of blanket dismiss all of the religious community that he was surrounded by, but a lot of them thought that they by and large had it sorted, but also a lot of them made things very difficult for all the members of their community because they would kind of pile up these little miniscule rules and they would put themselves forward as the ones who were, the role models, the good example, the ones who ever they should follow.

And it looked like to them just an accumulation of good deeds, but Jesus says it's much more than that. He says it's a matter of the heart. For example, that section at the start of verse 21, he's talking about murder.

So the Ten Commandments, their laws say don't murder, well they knew that, didn't they? But what does Jesus say? He actually takes, as it were, the ethic, he takes it further.

[12 : 05] So he says, but I tell you that anyone who's angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Now can any of you tonight say that you've never been angry with anybody? I don't think so.

I can't say that. That would have challenged the people that he was speaking to. If you've been angry with somebody, he's saying it's the root of that place that gets you to murder.

It begins in your heart with that root of hatred, jealousy, however it comes about that you begin to look at your brother or sister with anger and that can lead to murder.

So Jesus is saying that rather than making religion a matter of externals, it's a matter of the heart. That's challenging for us, isn't it?

We're very capable of thinking that we're good people. Now even if we know that we're Christians and we know the theory that means we believe in Jesus' righteousness, it's still very possible, particularly in a Christian community, to kind of elevate ourselves and think, well, if only everybody was like me, you know, I'm really good at doing X, Y or Z.

[13 : 19] But we need to ask ourselves some difficult questions sometimes, I think. It can be very subtle this way in which we can maybe elevate ourselves and we can think that good deeds done equate favor with the rest of the Christian church or even with God.

I've been so good this week. You know, have you ever given to the church? But we're completely the wrong motives.

You've given to the church and you've thought, look how much I gave. Or you've given to the church and thought, I really wish I didn't have to give that. And so it can be very possible for us to look like we're doing the right thing and for our hearts to be miles away.

Now you know that probably. You know the tension that you have sometimes between what you do and how you feel about it, following the ways of the Lord and wanting to follow the ways of the Lord. And in many ways, that tension will never go away. But the key thing here, as again, we've just looked at a couple of verses really just begun the process of looking at the teaching that Jesus brings in this passage, in this sermon.

[14:32] The key thing is that what Jesus isn't doing here is just saying, here are my teachings, live this way and you'll get saved. Because of course, all that Jesus taught here and all through his ministry.

And as he says, all of the teachings of the law and the prophets that he fulfills, that's the point is that he fulfills them. See he's completely consistent with everything he teaches.

This is the way he lives. At no point did Jesus take a step back from the responsibilities of being perfect. See I've been perfect for three years, it's time I took a break, it's too hard.

So he wasn't hypocritical. And again, I think that's another thing that people often assume about Christians or religious leaders that they're just a bunch of hypocrites. And they say one thing and they do another.

Or they sound great, really all they're doing is they're trying to look after themselves, make their own lives comfortable, make people look up to them, give them prestige or whatever it is. You think of an example in a, I was thinking of a book, you know Animal Farm, I don't know if you've read Orwell's Animal Farm.

[15:42] The thing about that is that on the farm the animals have a revolution. They're being oppressed by the bad farmers and they kick them out. And the animals are left, wonderful, free.

And the point is that they're all equal. They have this rule that they make amongst themselves that all the animals are equal. It's a kind of fable really. Part of this whole idea of communism I suppose.

But what happens as you go through the novel is that the leaders, the clever ones, the pigs on the farm, gradually the rest of the animals start to notice there's something different about them.

Because they start to just make separate rules for themselves. They start to make themselves a little bit more comfortable. They start to twist the rules that they made at the start, the commandments, to suit themselves.

And gradually what we end up with at the end of the novel is that they've become the new elite oppressing the rest of the animals. So they're hypocrites. They're just out to get for themselves.

[16:44] They manipulate the other animals to get ahead. Now that's such a common experience amongst humanity. It can be a common experience even amongst ourselves.

But Jesus is a suitable savior for you and me because no point in his ministry and in any of his life, the 30 years leading up to his public ministry, did he compromise.

No point. His lowest, most tired level, because remember what we've seen, Jesus is subject to the same physical constraints that we are, as a human, at his most tired.

You know we sometimes make that excuse, don't we? I'm just so tired, I can't be bothered tonight.

The time he was most tempted, if you think about an obvious example like when he was tempted in the wilderness by the devil himself, and all the other points in which he was tempted at no point did he compromise at every point he was consistent.

And at every point he wanted to do what he did. At no point did he grudge it, at no point did he do it under duress.

[17:56] Isn't that astounding? And that's worth thinking about, I think. It's worth contemplating that, meditating on it, because it shows us the kind of savior we have. But not only did he kind of tick a bunch of boxes, he willingly came and he willingly served.

And remember that verse? He learned obedience through suffering and that meant it wasn't easy for him. But he willingly did all of that. It made me think of a Sam, Sam 40, verse 8.

And I think it's a challenging verse. It can be challenging for us to sing the Psalms, can't it? Because it's sometimes when we're singing, it exposes what we're like, which is actually probably a good thing.

But this verse in Sam 40, it says, I desire to do your will. Oh my God, your law is within my heart. I don't know about you, but singing that is challenging. I desire to do your will.

It's like when you read Sam 119 or when we sing it together, a lot of that, as I've said, speaks about the desire to do the law of God. Do you always desire to do the law of God?

[18 : 58] You're always somebody who wants to do, not just feels he has to do. As we sing it, though, of course, it's a stimulus to us. It encourages us.

As we sing it together, we're encouraged by singing it together. We should be encouraged as a Christian community to work together, to obey.

But also, of course, as we sing a Psalm like that, we think of Christ. We think of the fact that he did that when we couldn't. He perfectly obeyed.

So that's an introduction to the act of obedience of Jesus. Jesus lived his life deliberately according to God's will. And he did that because we can't.

And so, just to conclude that way, that means that at no point is it OK for us to go back to our kind of works righteousness. It doesn't make sense. It's mad for us to take upon ourselves again the idea that it's by what we do, by our fantasticness, by how great a Christian we are, how moral we are that we'll get saved.

[20 : 05] That goes completely against the teachings of the Bible. So let's reject that. Let's make sure, let's check our own hearts and make sure that that isn't there.

By saying that, what we're saying is that what Christ did isn't enough. Sure, Christ was good, but it also really depends on me. Or God will really be impressed by me doing this, as if what Christ did isn't completely sufficient.

But equally, we should be motivated to perfect living, shouldn't we?

If Christ did that for us, if he lived perfectly and willingly perfectly, even to the cross, then that is the gospel that changes the way that we want to live.

Then there's no room for us to say, oh, good, Jesus has done it. You know that verse in Galatians. You, my brothers, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge this sinful nature.

[21 : 06] So there's no room for that either, is there? There's these two extremes that we can be pulled towards in our Christian life. Doing it all by ourselves again, or saying, hey, I'm a Christian, I have liberty I can do as I wish.

But let's guard our hearts and pray for each other and guard, or seek to encourage one another to guard our hearts against those extremes.

Jesus is an appropriate saviour because he lived his life in this way. But the second thing, more briefly, is this idea of the passive obedience of Jesus. Now, I suppose when you say passive, I want to qualify that, is it sounds as if that's saying that Jesus didn't do something.

Usually if you're passive, it means that you're not involved. When people talk about the passive obedience, they're talking about something like, as with our second reading, which is what we're going to turn to now, what Jesus went through on the cross, that sense of Jesus, things happening to Jesus.

Jesus was crucified. And because of his crucifixion, because of all that he went through, he is our saviour. He paid the penalty for our sins. But here's the thing.

[22 : 20] I kind of want to say that this is the active passive obedience of Jesus, because it's not like this just happened and Jesus was taken up in it and he had no control over it.

Jesus allowed this to happen to him. Jesus allowed these things as we come towards this last section in Matthew chapter 27. So let's just think, if you turn with me just to Matthew chapter 7, the one, 27, I want to pull out a couple of things from this.

Again, just to see this whole idea of the sufficiency of Jesus and all that he did. So as well as perfect allegiance to God, he also deliberately endured the hell of the cross and all that led up to it. It's right for us to focus on the cross, but it's startling, isn't it? What happened to Jesus? If you think of it, to Jesus, the Son of God, what happened to him in the run up to the cross, the way that he was treated.

And I just want to look at that just for a couple of minutes. If you look at chapter 27 verse 31, now bear in mind that this is Jesus going to the cross, and that means that this is the King.

[23 : 33] This is the one who will be raised again by God and who now reigns, who sits in heaven at the right hand of the Father. This is the King, and we're thinking about the way that he's treated as he goes to the cross.

In verse 32, Jesus says, after I've risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. So Jesus determines to go on the way into the way to the cross.

And in verse 27 verse 31, after they'd mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him, then they led him away to crucify him.

They mocked him. So the King, the Son of God, the one who came from heaven, the one who's lived his life in perfect obedience, is just mocked.

He's made fun of. You see that in that whole section leading up to that verse, the way that they treated him. They twisted together a crown of thorns and they set it on his head.

[24 : 37] I was thinking about the description in, I don't know if you've read the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Two illustrations from books tonight, sorry. Do you remember that, so C.S. Lewis uses that book to kind of parallel the experience of what Jesus went through.

And his champion, as it were, is Aslan, the great lion, who is the focal point of the story. But in that story, of course, he goes, Aslan goes, is led to the stone table where he has killed, where he has sacrificed.

But one thing that stood out, just as I was remembering that story, is the shame that is described that he goes through. And what they do, if you've read the story, you'll know, or if you've seen the movie of it, is they cut his mane off.

So this great, powerful lion is led forward by these wicked, kind of evil beings. And what they do in the run up to killing him, that kind of description of the sacrifice, is they kind of shave him.

They cut his mane off. They cut his glory off. I think it's C.S. Lewis trying to describe in some kind of way. You may think that's appropriate or not, but I think it's a good description of the way in which Jesus had to endure this huge sense of the indignity and the evil that was put upon him and that was acted towards him.

[25 : 58] The anger and the vitriol and the spite that he endured as he went to the cross. They mocked him, Hail, King of the Jews. Who do you think you are, Jesus, King of the Jews?

We read that Jesus endured the cross, the shame of the cross for the joy that was set before him. So he has to go through this derision.

But it's also striking to see the way in which people presume that he's impotent, as it were. He's got no power. He's unable to do anything. Look at verse 40.

Verse 39, those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads. Verse 40, they said, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself. Come down from the cross if you're the Son of God.

And again in verse 42, he saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. He's the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross and we'll believe in him.

[26 : 59] Complete mockery. They just thought he was making it all up. They laughed at him. And they really called him out and said, you can't do anything, you've got no power.

But the incredible thing here, you see what Jesus says, and this is why we think about the passive obedience of Jesus. Because this is still the King, Jesus, on the cross.

In chapter 26, he said these words, and these are so relevant here. He says, do you not think I cannot call on my Father and He will at once put on my disposal more than 12 legions of angels. It was possible for Jesus, in all his power, to call for the power in the might of heaven to come down to rescue him and to completely obliterate all those who were doing this to him.

But he didn't. He didn't do that. And so he endured the shame of the cross. And he went through that. And of course, we know that he deliberately did that.

[28 : 00] He did that willingly. And he did that again because of the joy that would be set before him. Let me just read a verse from Isaiah. Isaiah 53, just bringing out a couple of verses here that just really kind of bring out the sense of the deliberateness of Jesus, even though it seems like he's passive, even though it seems that he's helpless.

And Isaiah 53, he was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Now he could have done because he had the power, but he didn't.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shears is silent, so he didn't open his mouth. Didn't open his mouth. And so in a sense, that's what's meant by the passive obedience of Jesus, that Jesus at every point in his life, as he, as he willed and as he acted and as he did, he was obedient and even as he was acted upon at this, at this kind of black point where he faces the horror of the cross, Jesus willingly goes through it and it doesn't take himself out of the situation as

he could have done.

And he did this for us. He's a savior who is a willing savior because in all of our sinfulness and in all of our blackness and all of the ways in which we let him down, even as those who believe, he loved first.

He loved you and me so much that he was willing to come and do this. He did this for you and me. It's in Hebrews, this verse I've been quoting, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, scorned at shame.

[29 : 39] And then it describes how he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. It was joy for Jesus to think that through this suffering and this obedience to suffering, he would be united with his people.

He would purchase for himself a people who would be, who would be with him, who would be his people. So that's what we're called to as Christians, those who are called to be united to Christ, his people bought by his blood, set free from sin into this glorious new freedom because he loved us, because he wanted to do this, because he wanted that when we were united with him in heaven that we would have fellowship with him.

That's just a great truth for us to hold on to and not to forget. And so what do we do with this? Well, I just simply want to say that in closing, know that Christ is a suitable Savior.

You can't save yourself and you can't add to what he's done. Please don't think that. Always testify if you're witnessing to the fact that Jesus is sufficient.

But of course that doesn't take away from the fact that it's right for us then to seek to live good, godly lives, to live holy lives. This is a suitable Savior, give thanks to him.

[31 : 06] Is it possible that we as Christians can stop giving thanks for all that he's done for us? Surely that's not possible. I mean, what are we going to spend eternity doing but glorying in our God who's redeemed us, who's bought us and who's bought us into this great privilege?

And worship him. Let me read a verse just in closing from Revelation. I think worshiping, having that sense that we can go into the working week or the studying week or whatever week you've got with all that you've got to do, how do you go through the week when you feel that you've got very little time and worship the Lord?

It doesn't necessarily mean you have to spend X amount of hours doing particular things, saying prayer, but remember the salvation that has been bought for you and even in those five minutes that you have in your lunch or however it works out for you this week, remember what he has done for you willingly and that he's a suitable Savior and then you'll be led to worship him even in those few moments.

Revelation chapter 5 verse 11, then I looked and heard the voice of many angels numbering thousands upon thousands and 10,000 times 10,000.

They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders in a loud voice they sang, worthy as the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

[32 : 41] Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them singing to him who sits on the throne into the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever.

The four living creatures said Amen. That's an appropriate response to an appropriate Savior. He's a Savior that we have and the one we can rejoice in tonight.

Let me pray. Thank you Jesus that you are a Savior we can be confident in. Thank you for your obedience.

Thank you that you did this for us. Help us never to grow complacent about this. Forgive us when we do. Your love for us is something that we can hardly comprehend.

We would pray that we would see the love you have for us and that it would help us to love you more. We ask that in Jesus' name. Amen.