



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Why the Need for a Savior

Guest(s): Dr. James Dobson

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, a radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to the special edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. In just a moment, you're going to hear Dr. James Dobson share his classic Good Friday message on why the need for a savior. First though, I want to encourage you to sign up to receive a written copy of this personal message about Easter. It's featured in our March monthly newsletter. And you can receive Dr. Dobson's newsletter each and every month absolutely free. For more information, just visit drjamesdobson.org/newsletters. Okay, here now is Dr. James Dobson and his message about the need for a savior.

Dr. James Dobson: Dear friends, soon you and I will celebrate the most important holiday, literally holy day on the Christian's calendar. Easter is not primarily a secular observance designed to usher in the warmth of spring, nor is it simply a day for children to hide eggs and overindulge on chocolate bunnies. Despite modern culture's attempts to reinvent this day of celebration, Easter is, at its heart, the Christian commemoration of Christ's death, and three days later, His emergence from the tomb and all the freedom and victory that these events entail. The resurrection is the historical marker that lies at the center of everything we believe, and within it is found the promise of eternal life for believers in Jesus Christ. The good news provides the only satisfactory explanation for why we're here and where we're going. The final heartbeat for the Christian is not the mysterious conclusion to a meaningless existence.

It is rather the grand beginning of a life that will never end. That's why we can proclaim, even at the graveside of a loved one who is a Christian, where, "oh death, is your victory. Where, oh death, is your sting," 1 Corinthians 15:55. I used to ponder a difficult theological question that appeared unanswerable at the time. It seems strange that God would send His only son, Jesus, to die in agony on the cross at Mount Calvary. I reasoned that God, as creator of the universe, was in charge of everything. That entitled Him to make His own rules and establish His boundaries. Therefore, it seemed to me that God could have provided any plan of salvation without accountability to anyone. It was logical to

my immature faith that He would create a system that would ultimately require the suffering and death of His own son on the cross.

I could not comprehend why He would put himself through such grief and sorrow on our behalf when He could have offered a less costly plan. I struggled with this issue as a young Christian, and I was perplexed by the questions it raised. I knew all the past answers given to me in Sunday school, and I could quote the Scriptures, but none of the interpretation satisfied me. It's interesting to look back on the things that troubled us in earlier days. I now have a better understanding of God's plan of salvation and what motivated it, and the explanation is of great significance for me because it deals with the very essence of Christianity. Before reading my conclusion about God's plan, you should know that I'm neither a minister, nor a pastor, nor a theologian. I can make no claims to theological expertise. I do, however, know a little Greek and a little Hebrew.

The Greek owns a gas station in Los Angeles, and the Hebrew runs a delicatessen in San Diego. That's a very bad joke, but it illustrates the fact that I am admittedly unqualified to speak as a biblical authority. However, this lack of theological training may help me communicate with other non-theologians in everyday language. If my explanation becomes a gross oversimplification for some people, I hope they will forgive me. Here then is my concept of the plan of salvation and why Jesus' death was necessary. It begins as it should with an understanding of God's nature. Throughout Scripture, the creator is represented by two uncompromising characteristics, His love and His justice. Both of these aspects are reflected in everything God does and none of His actions will ever contradict either component. The love and justice of God were especially evident when He created Adam and Eve. Obviously, He could have programmed them to love Him and obey His laws.

This could have been accomplished by creating them as highly sophisticated robots or puppets. He did in fact program the brains of lower animals, causing birds to build a certain kind of nest and wolves to kill wounded elk. They have no choice in the matter. It's built into their nature. But the Lord elected to put no instinctual behavior in mankind, leaving us free to learn. We have inclinations and urges and desires and feelings, et cetera, but we have no instincts. This explains the utter helplessness of human infants who are the most dependent of all creatures at birth. They lack the initial advantages of unlearned responses, but will later run circles around the brightest animals with locked in reactions. Such is the nature of our humanness. By granting us freedom of choice, therefore, God gave meaning to our love. He sought our devotion but refused to demand it.

However, the moment he created this choice, it became inevitable that He would eventually be faced with man's disobedience. I've heard Christians speculate on what might have happened if Adam and Eve hadn't disobeyed God. The answer seemed obvious to me. If they had not sinned, a subsequent generation would have. After all, if no one ever made the wrong choice, then there was no true choice to be made. But Adam and Eve did sin, as we know,

and thereby confronted God with the most serious dilemma of all times. His love for the human race was unlimited, which required that He forgive His disobedient children. The Bible says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him," Psalms 103:13. That's my favorite psalm. This is an analogy that I can comprehend. I know how I pity my children when they've done wrong. My inclination is to forgive them. But in spite of God's great love is justice required complete obedience. It demanded repentance and punishment for disobedience.

So herein was a serious conflict within God's nature. I'm speaking as a mortal human being trying to explain the nature of God, which is an impossible task, but let me continue. If He destroyed the human race as His justice would require in response to our sinful behavior, His love would've been violated. But if He ignored our sins, His justice would've been sacrificed. Yet neither aspect of His nature could be compromised. But God, in His marvelous wisdom and love, proposed a solution to that awful dilemma. If He could find one human being who wasn't worthy of damnation, just one individual in the history of mankind who had never sinned, a man or woman who was not guilty, then the sin of every other person on earth could be laid upon that one, and he or she could suffer for all of us.

So God being timeless, looked across the ages of man from Adam to Armageddon and He could not find anyone who was innocent. It would later be written for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23. There wasn't a person who was worthy of assuming the guilt and blame and punishment for the rest of us. Therefore, the only alternative was for God to send his only son to bear the sins of the entire human family. And herein, we see the beauty of God's plan and the reason Jesus had to die. When He was crucified here on earth, Jesus reconciled relationship between man and God, and harmonized the conflict between God's love and justice and provided a remedy for fallen mankind. That touches my heart. Thus Jesus said as He was dying, "It is finished, meaning I've carried out the plan of salvation that God designed for sinful man." And that's why God turned His back on Jesus when He was on the cross, prompting the sacrificial lamb of God to cry in anguish, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46.

In that moment, Jesus was bearing the punishment for all human sin down through the ages, yours and mine. This understanding of the plan of salvation is not based on guesses and suppositions. Of course, it's drawn from the literal interpretation of God's word. The message is in fact the primary theme of all Scripture. The Old Testament says Jesus is coming, and the New Testament said, Jesus is here. But if I had to select one passage to represent the concept that I've presented, it would be the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. It's my favorite chapter in the Bible. It was written 700 years before the birth of Christ and provides an incredible prophecy of His mission. The summary of God's entire plan is summarized in this one chapter. Let me read a portion of it.

"Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender chute and like a root out of a dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind. A man is suffering and familiar with pain. Like one for whom people hide their faces, he was despised and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him. And by his wounds, we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before it, shears is silent, he did not open his mouth."

I do hope that you'll take the time to read the rest of Isaiah 53 because it contains prophecies regarding his resurrection and His ultimate victory. Isn't that an absolutely wonderful prophecy of the Messiah to come? He laid out the plan of salvation, not just for the Jews, but it reached 2,700 years ago to our day and applies to us and our sin. He makes it clear why God's plan necessarily involved His own son, His grief and sorrow and death. Only by paying this incredible price could He harmonize the potential contradiction between love and justice and provided a way of escape for mankind. It also explains why there is no other name by which we are saved and why we cannot escape if we neglect so great as salvation, Hebrews 2:3. One important question remains to be answered. Just how does a person proceed now to accept this plan and follow the risen Lord? I believe there are two basic steps in the process, although some churches emphasize only one.

The first is to believe in the name of Jesus Christ, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Romans 10:13 says it another way. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." So the first obligation for anyone is to accept what Christ did as being for him or her personally. But as I understand the Scripture, and from my own theological perspective, there is a second responsibility which is often underemphasized. While it's true that you cannot work your way to salvation, it's a gift of unmerited grace.

Repentance is still an important part of the process. It is surprising to me how many times this word appears in the Scripture. Here are a few examples from dozens of references to repentance in both the Old and New Testaments. Frankly, it amazes me that many churches and many pastors don't talk about that aspect of the plan of salvation. It's rarely mentioned. It's not seen as relevant to the acceptance of this relationship with Christ. Let's look at what the prophets and the great men of the Bible had to say about that word. That's where we get our information. That's where we get our understanding. And it includes the words of the greatest of them all, Jesus himself. Listen, Isaiah said,

this is what the sovereign Lord, the holy one of Israel says, "In repentance, and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it," Isaiah 30:15. This is what Ezekiel wrote. "For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone declares the sovereign Lord, repent and live," Ezekiel 18:32.

Here's what Jesus had to say about it. He's our ultimate authority. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." They're the two elements that I mentioned. Jesus also said, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent," Luke 15:7. Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you'll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," Acts 2:38. Peter also said, "Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, Acts 3:19."

You see the repetitive nature of this component of the plan? Here's what Paul said. "In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands..." Listen carefully. He commands all people everywhere to do what? To repent, Acts 17:30. Paul also said, "Yet, now I'm happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance, for you become sorrowful as God intended, and so were not harmed in any way by us," Second Corinthians 7:9. How about John the Baptist, about whom Jesus said no greater man ever lived? This is what He said when the Pharisees came out to visit him. But when He saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where He was baptizing, He said to them, boy, this is powerful, "You brood of vipers." Why do you say that? Because they had sin in their life, unconfessed sin. "Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath, produce fruit in keeping with repentance," Matthew 3:7 and 8.

Luke said this. When they heard this, they had no further objections, and praised God saying, "So then, even to Gentiles, God has granted repentance that leads to life." That's Acts 11:18. That's you and me. Repentance is a word that's often misunderstood. What does it really mean? The late Billy Graham, whose funeral I attended, defined repentance as having three parts to it. The first is conviction. You have to know what's right before you can do what's right. In simple terms, conviction is a deep awareness of one sin and guilt. The Holy Spirit draws us to Himself and gives us a desire to harmonize our relationship with Him. The second component of repentance is contrition. Contrition is being sorry for one's sin and depravity.

When I knelt at an altar at four years of age, I wept like the baby I was. I certainly didn't understand the meaning of contrition, but I knew I wanted Jesus to forgive me for my sin and come to live in my heart. Don't tell me a child is incapable of understanding what that means. I experienced it, and that memory is as vivid to me today as it was all those decades ago. The third aspect of repentance is a willingness to change. It involves becoming a follower of Jesus

Christ and changing one's behavior and thought patterns. The apostle Paul warned us, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will," Romans 12:3. I think it would be helpful, in conclusion, to give an example of the kind of prayer that a person might pray if he or she understands what I've been writing and wants to accept Jesus Christ as his or her own Lord and Savior.

Let me express it this way. "Lord, I bring you my sinful nature as you've revealed it to me. I know I don't have anything valuable to offer except myself and my love. I can't earn your forgiveness, and you've offered it as a gift from your son, Jesus Christ. I accept your control of my life, and I intend to serve you, obey you, and follow you from this moment forward. You have my past, my present, my future, my family, my money, and my time. Nothing will I withhold. And thank you for loving me and forgiving me and making me your own. Amen."

Oh Lord, I pray that there's somebody out there in a sinful state and knows it, and now understands it, and now comprehends what it is that God expects of them and what Jesus came to do for us. I pray for that person who has been confused about the meaning of it all, and perhaps because of these words and the foolishness of preaching, their eyes have been opened and they now see what God wants of them. Well, the reason for this discussion today is that we're pointing toward the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection. Let me say, in closing, because my time is gone, to those of you who are overwhelmed by the cares of life and burdened by the weight of the world during this Easter season, I urge you to look to the risen Christ. May His grace and peace and presence surround you and your loved ones, not only on Easter Sunday, but every day for the rest of your life. He is risen. He is risen indeed.

Roger Marsh:

Well, what an eloquent message about salvation from our very own Dr. James Dobson here on this Good Friday edition of Family Talk. Remember, the transcript of this message is included in Dr. Dobson's March monthly newsletter. And if you'd like to receive that absolutely free, go drjamesdobson.org/newsletters. Also, before we leave, just want to mention that here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we've been remastering Dr. Dobson's biblically based transforming truths into one minute audio messages. They're called the Dr. Dobson Minute. To learn more, you go to drdobsonminute.org and you can hear a sample. That's drdobsonminute.org. Well, I'm Roger Marsh. And on behalf of everyone here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, have a blessed Easter. Remember, He has risen. Christ has risen indeed.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.