

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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October 18th, 2026

Sermon Title: Definite Atonement: The Death of Death

Sermon Text: Romans 8:32; John 10:11-15

Rom. 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[...]

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

John 10:13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

John 10:15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Main Point: Christ did not die a hypothetical death to make salvation possible; He laid down His life intentionally to secure and guarantee the salvation of a specific, globally diverse people given to Him by the Father.

Outline:

1. The Work of Christ
2. The Intention of Christ
3. The Universal Scope of Christ

Introduction

Today we are going to do something slightly different as we continue our journey through Romans. I want us to look at two passages side-by-side. The first is our main text from Romans 8:32, which says:

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

The second is John 10:11-15, where Jesus says:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

As we have followed Paul through Romans, we’ve seen him consistently root our salvation in the sovereign, electing grace of God. But in 8:32, Paul gives us the logic of the cross. And it was something we didn’t dwell on when we were in chapter 8, but after what we’ve seen in Romans 8 and 9 we can now look back at it, I think, in a new light. Because, notice the link Paul makes: If God the Father gave up His Son for you, He will absolutely give you all things—meaning your final salvation, your justification, and your future glory... all of it is yours. If he’ll give you his son... then why wouldn’t he give you these other things?

Think about what that means when it comes to the cross. Follow the thinking: “If God gave Christ to die for someone, their final salvation is guaranteed.”

If he gives you the one... he will give you the other. Nobody gets Christ and his sacrifice and doesn’t get the salvation that Christ has purchased with his own blood.

What we begin to see as we follow Paul’s thinking is that the cross is not a halfway measure. Christ’s death isn’t a potential remedy poured out and left up to human effort to apply; it is a definite, substitutionary payment that perfectly accomplished exactly what the Father intended.

This brings us to one of the doctrines of grace that is sometimes called Definite Atonement, or Particular Redemption. You may have heard it called “Limited

Atonement” before, but I think that really misrepresents what it is, because calling it “limited” makes it sound like there is something small and finite about the death of Jesus when in fact, there is nothing more infinite and precious in value than the death of the son of God Himself.

So I think limited atonement is not a good term because it miscommunicates so much. I far prefer definite atonement.

What is definite atonement? It is this: “When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He did not die a general, hypothetical death to merely make salvation a *possibility* for a faceless general mass of mankind that he hoped would perhaps respond. Instead, He died a specific, intentional death that actually purchased, secured, and guaranteed salvation for a specific foreknown people who are his sheep.”

Now, I chose to bring in Jesus’ words from John 10 because the way Paul talks about it, it’s almost like math. It isn’t, but it can seem like that. It’s highly logical, reasonable, it makes sense. That’s important.

But in John 10, Jesus gives us a very different and more intimate and personal look at what I would argue is the same teaching. Jesus tells us that he is the Good Shepherd who steps in front of the wolf, laying down His life specifically for His beloved sheep. So if we want to appreciate the personal depth of what Paul is saying in Romans, I want us to spend part of our time looking closely at what Jesus is saying in John 10.

Now, I know this doctrine raises immediate questions. If Christ died to secure a specific flock, what do we do with verses like 1 Timothy 2:6, which says Christ gave Himself as a ransom for *all*, or 1 John 2:2, which says He is the propitiation for the sins of the *whole world*? If that is the question burning in your mind, hold onto it. We are going to look closely at what the Bible means when it speaks of Christ dying for “the world” in our final point today. But before we look at what Christ's death means for the whole world, we have to look at the Shepherd's work and the shepherd’s intention.

1. The Work of Christ

So let’s start there with our first point: the work of Christ.

Paul tells us that God “did not spare his own son.” So here he’s talking about the death of Jesus. This is what we mean by the “work of Christ.” The death of Jesus is necessary because the holiness of God means that our sin demands a holy response to our unholy disobedience. Because God is good and holy, he would be bad and unholy if he were indifferent toward sin. Sin must be punished. And what Paul says here is that God “did not spare his own son.”

The work of Christ is the work of sin removal. To bring in Jesus’ words from John 10, the work of removing sin and rescuing his people required the son to “lay his life down for the sheep.” So the work of Christ is his sacrificial death, receiving the punishment that sin deserves.

The other really important thing to see is that in Romans we see that God intended for his son to die. “[He] did not spare his own son.” There’s a willingness there on the part of God. And then in John 10 Jesus says, “I lay my life down for the sheep.” So what you see is that it’s not like the Father and Son are at odds here, and the Father won out of something. They are both of one intention in his death. Jesus Christ says that he willingly lays his life down. In one sense he is a victim because he didn’t deserve to die. But in another sense, he was not a victim, because he tells us that his life was his own to lay down and take up.

If you want to understand the work of Christ, possibly the best place to look is the book of Leviticus, where we see the sacrificial laws laid out very clearly: that when someone sins, they are subject to death. And yet, atonement can be made for sin so that the relationship between the sinner and the holy God can be restored. And so when atonement is made, the sin is dealt with definitively, and the sinner is no longer treated as a sinner because the sin really has been answered by the blood of another.

Jesus, when he says that he lays his life down is saying what the author of Hebrews reminds us of in Hebrews 10: that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The definitive once and for all sacrifice that the whole sacrificial system was pointing to always was the death of Jesus.

In Isaiah 53, God tells us the sad but victorious story of the Suffering Servant. And in that passage, which teaches us about Jesus we’re told this:

“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” (Is. 53:4-5).

So when the Bible speaks of the work of Christ, it speaks in terms of taking our place. Substitution. We were supposed to be pierced, but he was pierced. We deserved to be crushed, but instead he was crushed. We were supposed to be chastised, but instead he was chastised. The word we use for that is penal. We should have gotten a penalty, but instead he received the penalty.

Substitution. And Isaiah tells us, Jesus stood in our place, and he took the stripes, and he was crushed, and he was pierced, when it should have been us.

And it's atonement because in doing these things, an exchange happens and our relationship with God is restored. This is why Isaiah 53:11 says that in his work “the righteous one...[shall] make many to be accounted righteous.”

What Jesus has done is, he's given us a look behind the scenes of the plan of redemption: in eternity, the Father foreknew and foreloved a specific people, giving them to the Son so that the Son would willingly lay his life down to save those ones who had been given to him by the father from eternity.

Jesus lays his life down because his people are his, and he loves them.

This is what we're talking about when we talk about the work of Christ. He comes, lives, suffers, dies, and rises again, and in doing so delivers sinners from death. That is the work of Jesus Christ, and it is glorious! It speaks to his grace. It speaks to his power. It speaks to his Justice. None of them compromised in the work of redemption. The work of Jesus Christ.

2. The Intention of Christ

Second, we should dwell on the intention of Christ in his death.

The question that we are asking is, what does Jesus say that he intended to happen when he laid his life down? Well we saw already: he intended to lay his life down to save sinners. He intended that when he died, that he would actually save

his sheep by taking their place as a sacrifice. That he would receive the punishment that they ought to receive.

Let's look back at Romans 8:32 again. Paul says that God "gave [his son] up *for us all*." I want you to notice this personal angle to the death of Jesus. He has specific people in mind in his work. Paul says, he didn't just die. He wasn't just given up generally. But he was given up "for" a specific group: namely "us all"! Here Paul is, writing as one member of the church to these other members of Christ's church, and he says, when Jesus died, it was for the benefit of "us."

Now, we will talk about this "all" language that we see in our third point. But notice that for Paul he is sure of one thing: Jesus laid his life down for people – of whom Paul believes he and his recipients are among.

Jesus then tells us in our passage from John 10 that the way he cares for the sheep is better than the way a hired hand cares for the sheep. Because there are limits to what a hired hand will do. Jesus says that because the hired hand does not own these sheep, he "leaves the sheep and flees." The hired hand has a transactional and technical relationship with the sheep. How is Jesus different?

The difference is that Jesus has a deep, personal care for the sheep because he owns them. Earlier in John 6:37, Jesus told us that

"all that the Father *gives me* will come to me...and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose none that *he has given me*."

In John 17:6 in his high priestly prayer, Jesus looks to heaven and prays that he has shown the name of the Father

"to the people whom *you gave me* out of the world. Yours they were, and *you gave them to me*."

So over and over again, Jesus uses this language of believers having been given to Him by the Father, almost as one gives a gift to someone that he loves. And here Jesus says, that's what the people are that he dies for: The Father gave them to him, and so he loves them, and so of course he willingly dies for them.

Because they are given to him, Jesus has an intimate connection with each and every one of them. He knows them. He says in verse 14: "I know my own and my

own know me.” It is these sheep who are “given” to Jesus, whom Jesus “knows,” whom he says that he “cares” for. And these are things that are not true of every human being. In other words, Jesus knows that he has a specific people, rooted in the sovereign determination and election of God from before the world was made or any of us were even born. It is these whom Jesus says, he lays his life down for. They are his sheep. The goats are not his sheep.

And this means something else that I think is just so incredibly powerful. It means that when Jesus lays his life down... when he dies... he dies for the benefit of specific sinners. They have faces. He knows them. They have names. They are written in the lamb’s book of life. He adores them because the Father has given them to the Son. He is dedicated to them to the point of death!

And here is what is also so incredible here: because his love precedes your faith, because the death of Christ for you comes before you were even born, you can’t do something to endanger that. Because his work is his work, not your work.

Notice how connected the death of Jesus Christ is to this doctrine of election that we’ve been opening up over the previous weeks. God’s freedom and choice precedes the death of Jesus and defines the scope and purpose of his death. He knows what he came to do. And he accomplished precisely what he came to do. This is why Isaiah tells us that

“out of the anguish of his soul [the suffering servant] shall see and be satisfied” (Is. 53:11).

Why will he be satisfied? Because not a drop of his blood is wasted. Not a single moment of anguish is thrown away. Every single one meant to be delivered by Jesus Christ will be delivered by Jesus Christ. And that is because he dies for his people. He dies for the sheep, not the goats.

If He died for the "goats" who eventually perish in hell, then there is a dilemma. either His death was insufficient to save them, or the Father punished their sins twice—once in Christ, and once in themselves eternally in hell.

You see, when we talk about this question of limited atonement, definite atonement, whatever you might call it, the question is not about the *value* of Christ’s death: his death is infinite in its value because he is “very God of very God,

begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” There’s no question about the value of the death of Jesus Christ. The question is: what was God’s intention in the death of the Son?

Paul says the Father gave the Son “up for *us* all.” Jesus says he lays his life “down for the *sheep*.” Isaiah says he was “pierced for *our* transgressions.” In other words, his intention was to save his people... those given. Not merely to make salvation possible, but to actually save.

Jesus is a perfect, complete, intentional savior. When he lays his life down, that death accomplishes what it was intended to.

3. The Universal Scope of Christ

Now, this brings us to our third point, which is the universal scope of Christ.

Let’s just stick with Jesus in John 10 again. Look at verse 16. Right after telling us that he lays his life down for his sheep, Jesus says this:

“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

This “fold” Jesus was talking about was the ethnic nation of Israel. Here Jesus is keeping his Jewish listeners from thinking that THEY are the only ones who are his sheep. They need to know that’s not the case.

Jesus wants them and us to know he has sheep from all over the world. The vision God has always had for his church was to rescue people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

And in fact, we use that language of “every tribe and tongue and nation” quite often, and for good reason. In that passage from Revelation 5:9, God is telling us what his church will look like once all of his sheep have been rescued. And it’s this amazing image of a world of people who are all so very different from each other, but all united under Christ.

Now, keep thinking about this passage a moment. We’ve been talking about this idea of definite atonement, so I want you to see that even in that universal passage that speaks of this wide scope of Christ’s work, we again see that language

of definite atonement or limited atonement (if you find that term to be more familiar). But listen to what the text in Revelation 5:9 actually says, speaking of Christ:

"By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

Do you see what John does in writing this? He's taking for granted that the atonement is universal in its categories ("people from everywhere"), even if it is particular in its individuals (people from every tribe, but not absolutely every person from every tribe).

Now, this is where I want to mention a point of confusion: there most definitely are passages that out of context will sound like Jesus died in order to try to save all people and not a particular people. For example, 1 John 2:2 tells us,

"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

Another passage that seems to sound very universal is 1 Timothy 2:6:

"Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."

I'm sure you've seen passages like this before in your Bible reading.

When we read these verses, we have to ask a simple question: What did the biblical writers mean when they used the words "all" or "the world"? We use the word "all" like this every day. If a teacher says, "Is everyone here?" she doesn't mean every person on planet earth; she means everyone *in her specific class*. Context determines the meaning even of words that sound universal in their scope.

I can't go through every instance of "all," but bear with me in one example. Look at the context of 1 John 2:2. John was a Jewish believer, writing to a community of believers. When he says Jesus died "for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world," he is making the exact same point Jesus made in John 10! He is saying, "Jesus didn't just die for us here in this *particular church, this particular place*; He died for the other sheep scattered across the whole world." The Jews in particular had a persistent temptation to draw the circle of God's

grace tightly around themselves and to leave out the gentiles (“God is with us, not them”). The biblical writers are constantly pushing back against that temptation.

The exact same thing is happening in 1 Timothy 2. Just a few verses before Paul says Jesus is a “ransom for all,” Paul tells the church to pray for “all people.” But then he immediately defines what he means: “for kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Tim 2:2). In the first century, people didn't think God cared about saving pagan kings. Paul is saying, “Yes, He does! Pray for them! Don’t write them off from God’s grace! Jesus is a ransom for *all kinds of people*—kings, peasants, slaves, freemen, Jews, and Gentiles.”

So when the Bible says Jesus died for “all,” it doesn't mean all without *exception*—meaning every single human who ever lived. It means all without *distinction*. He died for all kinds of people, from every corner of the globe. The cross is highly specific, but its reach is gloriously worldwide.

What would have really shocked the original listeners was not that God wouldn't save every single individual on earth; the shock was that God was going to save *Gentiles*. That he was going to save these pagans.

Conclusion

What we actually see from Scripture is this incredible assurance that the promises of God never fail, and that the death of Jesus Christ is guaranteed not to be wasted.

This was the blueprint from the beginning with Abraham—that all families of the earth would be blessed. But Definite Atonement is actually the only doctrine that guarantees the Great Commission will be successful. He *must* bring them, and they *will listen* to His voice.

The Bible teaches particular redemption. But we must never confuse particular with small. The real shock of Romans 9, which Jesus completely reinforces here in John 10, is that this highly specific, sovereign mercy is poured out over the entire globe. The atonement is a targeted rescue mission, but its scope is the entire world.

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets constantly looked forward to a day when the borders of God's grace would burst wide open. God told the Son in Isaiah 49 that simply saving ethnic Israel was “too light a thing”—He deserved the ends of the earth.

This is what Jesus accomplished on the cross. When the Good Shepherd laid down His life, He secured a flock so vast, so diverse, and so beautifully united that it spans every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth. He died for His sheep, and He will not fail to bring every single one of them safely home.

Let's Pray.