

The Death of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Now I want to spend a little while this morning looking at this theme, looking at the theme of the crucifixion. And I hope that we can also relate it to baptism because baptism is a sign and a seal of those people who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a kind of badge of their belonging to Jesus and it's given to them and their families. And so it is faith in this crucified and risen Savior.

And tonight, today we're looking at his crucifixion because it's so central to our faith, it's so central to what we believe about ourselves and about God and about what he's done for us.

And it's so significant. So and by way of introduction, I'll probably be a little bit repetitive, so forgive me for that if you come every week. But there's really three great themes in Mark's Gospel. Mark, you know, he begins by saying this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He wants people to know who Jesus is and why he's so important, not just then but now, and God wants us to know that because he inspired Mark to write the Gospel. So Mark really has three very basic themes and they're very simple to understand and very important for us, God, ourselves and love. So that's his themes. They're great themes. They're themes that we can all kind of pick up on and understand. For most people today, outside of the church particularly, maybe God, well God's in the dock, isn't he? Ourselves, well we're all experts about ourselves and love, well love, let's make the work around, so we all know about love as well. And as I've said before with Mark, Mark's always there to challenge sometimes our preconceptions, sometimes our misunderstandings about God, ourselves and love, and wants us to think really seriously about Jesus, who Jesus is and what he has done for us because we believe as Christians that what he has done remains hugely significant that he has met with us, he's transformed our lives and we serve him and love him because he has redeemed us from our sins. But right from the very beginning of this Gospel of Mark, we find that Mark is making clear that Jesus is on a mission. It's not an ordinary biography, doesn't go through his childhood and his adolescence and then his working life and then a little bit about his death at the end. It's a really unusual balance, isn't it? We've got nothing about his birth, we've got straight into his three years of public ministry and in a big chunk about his last week, his death and resurrection. Jesus is on a mission, that's because his whole life is moving towards this point. He's not a victim, this wasn't a random event, this was something he was moving towards. He came as the Son of God to die, that was his mission, that was his purpose, and he was motivated by an incredible love for you and for me, for people, for humanity. And what I want us to do just for a little while is look at a little bit of Easter weekend, the first Easter weekend and apply that truth about Jesus to ourselves. I'm going to start late on Friday night, late on Friday night of the first Easter weekend and we read a little bit, the children read a little bit about what happened on Friday night, the first Friday night where Jesus was in Jerusalem and last week we looked at the Last Supper and what happened there and the prediction of betrayal.

So we come on late Friday night to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, betrayed by a kiss. It's these horrendous, the horrendous reality and Jesus is betrayed by his friend with a kiss in the Garden. Judas chooses to kiss Jesus to mark him out as being the one who needs to be arrested for 30 pieces of silver. He betrays Jesus and the band of brothers, the disciples, who had been close to Jesus for all that time. They also fled. So Jesus close his friends while he's here on earth as the Son of God, all betray him or deny him and he's left in this Garden of Darkness where very shortly a vigilante crowd come and there's a smell of stale sweat and a hatred and brutality and they come to arrest Jesus Christ, betrayed by his best friends, abandoned by his best friends. So we've got Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, who we believe is God, who is the author of life and the author of light and he's here in darkness, plunged into darkness, betrayed and rejected by his best friends, the friends that he came to die for.

But then we find he's taken into the Sanhedrin and it moves from his friends to the religious leaders, to the ministers, to the Bible believers, the religious authorities of the day and they have their own crowd and they beat him up as well. In the name of God they beat Jesus up. How ironic is that? Jesus is beaten up, spat on, his perfect human being, his Redeemer who's come on a mission and in the very rejection that he's facing we're finding that he is going to become the Redeemer.

[5 : 52] He's beaten up. In the name of God, God is standing right in front of them. He's rejected by his friends and he's rejected by the religious authorities and then of course he's denied in a very public and in a very real way by his best friend Peter. I think it was Gabriel who read that story around the fire, isn't he? Peter who was his closest buddy and he'd warned Peter this might happen and Peter was still able to deny that he knew Jesus. Don't know him. Don't know him.

Don't know him. Ashamed of Jesus. Well with friends like that, who needs enemies? Jesus who was used to perfect, Trinitarian fellowship, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, loving and looking at and facing one another, rejected, rejected by his best friend, beaten up by the religious authorities, betrayed by those who had been around him. His love, his grace, his character, his perfection, his message, his teaching, his miracles, all about him was rejected at this point on Friday night. But can I say it gets worse? Things get worse as we find out what's going on and we move to the chapter that we're looking at, chapter 15, we come to early Saturday morning. So we get Friday night and then we've got Saturday morning.

We're not told anything about what happened that night but it must have been a terrible night for Jesus Christ. He's beaten up, he's been spat on, he's been rejected and he's alone in a prison cell.

How tempting must it have been for him to go home to heaven? Is God that disinterested clockmaker? He sits in the prison cell. Does he not care for the realities of life as he sits there in the prison cell a whole night to think about what is he doing? What am I doing? What am I thinking about going to the crossfire? This lot for? They've all rejected and abandoned in turn. How many friends have? What's the game here? What's happening? Is he that disinterested, immoral and just and caring God who lies somewhere way up there in the heavens? Now he's sitting in a prison cell all night and then it gets worse in Saturday morning. He meets up with Pilate. So he's been betrayed by his friends and the religious authorities now he comes to the secular authorities and Pilate is the one who's going to judge him. So he's in the courtroom and he's paraded before this political dictator. There's no interest in justice whatsoever. No interest in Jesus innocence, no interest in what is right and wrong. He simply wants to do what is popular, what will gain him popularity with the Jewish people and with his own people and there's no justice whatsoever and he condemns this innocent man just by kind of saying who do you want this guy or this guy? This guy? Who's the better guy? Barabbas or Jesus? And he just goes with the crowd. He listens to what they're saying. He condemns the innocent man. Isn't that ironic also? But it's beautiful the way that Mark kind of brings out these different rejections that are going on peeling back all these layers of rejections from friends, from political leaders, from the religious authorities. We see it all. He's been rejected from every angle and justice hasn't been done.

And the one who's perfect is facing crucifixion. The judge of all the earth, Jesus Christ, the judge of all the earth, stands before Pilate and has in silence to take this condemnation from Pilate. Isn't that quite astonishing? If only Pilate realized what he was doing. Jesus who could look into his heart and he is judging Jesus and saying condemned to the cross, really with just a flick of a wrist. And then he's taken and he is mocked by the soldiers. So different angles and they're interesting angles. There's a lot of parody in many ways going on here.

[10:22] Brutal, thuggish soldier, Roman soldiers of the day, smelling the blood of the occasion and enjoying the thuggery of what they can engage in quite justifiably. And what do they do? They weave a crown for him, a crown of thorns. We know that so well and it's on a million different images.

But we really forget, don't we, the brutality of that and the pain and the suffering and the blood that it would have brought out. And they mock him, they put it on his head and they give him a robe and they bow down and they mock him as they hail the king of the Jews and they beat him up.

And it's all very understated. Mark doesn't make a great deal of it. He just states it. He just says this is what's happening. And again, in the same way as Pilate standing before the judge of all the earth, here are these soldiers, if only they knew this was the king of kings, if only they knew what they were doing in parody and in mockery for they didn't understand that Jesus was allowing this to happen in order to redeem them because he loved them. He allowed this mockery to go on.

He was the one who would have the power to forgive them, to raise the dead, to defeat evil, but he's rejected at every level, at every part of society. Mark is revealing that he's being just rejected as God yet he's still driving forward, isn't he? So early Saturday morning we now come to the breakfast crucifixion. Twenty to twelve years now, nine o'clock you were all up having your breakfast probably. Maybe not. But Jesus by this point was so weak, so brutalised, he couldn't carry his own cross, which was part of the part of the humiliation, part of the judgment. So someone carried his cross for him and yet he's lifted, very publicly lifted onto this cross for people to see, to further humiliate him and ridicule and deny him as he goes. That was one of the the real kind of shames of the cross, wasn't it? That it was very public that he was strit-naked, that he was exposed before the whole world, raised up for people to see. Horrible, horrible reality.

So you've got this picture of Jesus on the cross and we must put it in context and remember that this same Jesus was the one who in eternity was surrounded by adoration and worship.

[13 : 14] And here he is surrounded completely differently by hatred and rejection and humiliation and venom and brutality. But that's nothing as the layers of rejection are being peeled back to what happens next, because we have the deepest darkness, the most mysterious and awful rejection that tops everything by infinity.

Okay. The three most significant hours in the history of the universe, taking us into the perfect justice and love of God and taking us to the heart, not only of God but of our own need. So we've got this amazing, amazing rejection going on here that builds up and it builds up from all the other rejections of humanity and you've got darkness.

At midday, it's 20 to 12 just now. It's not very bright in Scotland anyway, but in the Middle East 12 o'clock, so when the sun's right, it's peak. But there's a natural darkness from 12, 6th hour to the 9th hour, 12 to 3 o'clock. The sun ceases to shine on these last three hours of Jesus' life because there's a symbolic reality of a cosmic event going on here. The sun wouldn't even look at it. And in that three hours, we hear that cry of Jesus, very well-known cry to us, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Forsakeness, rejection isn't just from the soldiers and the religious leaders and his friends and his best friend and the Roman soldiers and pilot and the crowd. The ultimate rejection is from God, his father. And that three hours across, that is what is absolutely and completely awful on this event. Because here, as they have agreed themselves, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that humanity is lost and separated from God, they can't make their own way back. They decide, we all need to put it right. And God the Father says to Son, will you go? And God the Son says, yes, I'll go. But it'll mean I'll need to turn my back at you. I know. I'm willing, you're willing. God within himself and all the mystery of that pours out his justice and pours out his wrath and punishes his son for all our wrongdoing. Absolutely voluntarily, Father and Son together in Holy Spirit. It's how can I put it in kind of everyday vernacular, God takes the hit.

God takes the hit himself for our failure and for our rejection from him. We can't put it right. We can't make ourselves perfect in God's hand. We can't stand before God in the last day and say, hey, except me, I've tried my hardest, I've done my best, I've been good as anyone else.

Because he says it doesn't meet up my perfect standard. But he says, I know that, but I've sent Jesus to do it in your place. It's absolutely astonishing. This once for all solution to our needs, that Jesus has paid the price for the things that separate us from God, so that we can be forgiven and have life and have relationship and will not ourselves be forsaken by God, but will know his love and his grace. And so he says at the end of that awesome three hours of rejection, well, more than that, more than the three hours beyond that, the earlier hours, he says, well, it doesn't say here in Mark's Gospel, it's in one of the other Gospels, but he cries out the loud voice, it's finished. And it wasn't just Jesus kind of whimpering a last couple of words before he expelled his breath and died. Jesus saying, I've done it.

[17 : 26] I've paid the price. It's finished. I'm no longer forsaken. I'm no longer the sin bearer. I've done it. I will now voluntarily give myself over to death to finish the task of being the redeemer, my people. It's finished. It's done. It's over. Mark says the curtain, that holy big, strong, massive curtain that separated God from his people in the temple was ripped in two to say that the way was open between ourselves and God. That's the crucifixion story, hugely significant one for us.

We cherish that as Christians, as historical reality. It's not fable. It's not make believe. We can't believe why anyone would make it up anyway. We believe that this risen, this crucified, risen Savior has changed, transformed our lives. It's absolutely great, good news for us. It's amazing. And the question always is for us, what do we do in our lives with Jesus Christ?

Do we accuse him of not caring? Can we in the light of what he's done? We accuse him of not understanding. Is that fair? We accuse him of being distant, far away, clockmaker who wound up the world and just let go its own way. Is he careless? Is he unfair?

Is he made up? We can only present Jesus crucified and risen and present him as the one who did this, because there was no other way and because he loves us. And because in our rejection, and who of us don't feel rejected at a human level sometimes, let alone with God, we can know acceptance and we can know belonging and we can know forgiveness and we can know transformation. And that is our gospel message.

There's three times in Mark's gospel earlier on in Jesus' life where Mark tells us that Jesus predicts his death. And it's very important and the theme of Mark is that Mark is always making clear right from the very beginning of his public ministry that Jesus knows what he's coming to do. He's coming for this purpose. He's coming for this reason. Three times Jesus predicts his death.

[20 : 06] And I just want to leave you with the challenge of the first time it's recorded in Mark's gospel chapter 8 and verse 31. Jesus says, and I leave you with this challenge, he then began to teach him that the Son of Man that's himself must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Peter turned and looked at his disciples he rebuked Peter. He said, get the behind me Satan. He said, you do not have the things in the mind of the things of God but things of men. Then he called the crowd to him along with the disciples and said, if anyone would come after me, Jesus says, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me for whoever wants to save his life will lose it. Whoever wants to lose his life for me and for this gospel will save it. What good is it for a person to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me, and in my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his father's glory with the holy angels. That's the invitation that Jesus gave before his crucifixion as he predicted what he had come to do to redeem us, to give us life, to give us hope and to give us a future. I hope and pray that we remember that, that we consider that and as Christians we give thanks for that, we rejoice in that, it gives us our perspective and it reminds us of the way we should be looking at life. And if you're not a believer in Jesus though you will be challenged by his love, by his willingness as God to be rejected and rejected, and rejected because his love drove him to the cross to provide the solution for our death, our sin, our rebellion and our lossness, our failure, our sense of rejection and all the other things that go on in our lives. So we come to baptism today. Last week we saw

Sophie being baptized and we spoke about baptism as the sign and the seal of Jesus entering into that binding relationship with us, sealed by his blood, when we put our faith and trust in him, it's this badge of belonging to Jesus Christ and it's part of this covenant of grace that he works through and in his people it's a sign and seal. It's a sign and seal, it's a covenant sign and seal for believers and for their children, a sign of what God will do, sign of promise, a sign to those parents. Dave and Sue today who have faith themselves, who recognize that they bring children into that place of privilege and place of responsibility, mirroring the covenant sign that was given to the believers in the Old Testament where they also received the sign of circumcision before they put their faith in the living God and had the faith that Abraham had himself. So we rejoice and give thanks that today Dave and Sue are coming with Bobby for baptism, having previously baptized Kai and Mary and we look forward to having them here down at the front. I hope Kai and Mary will come as well down to the front if they're around, we'll pull them up, the kids are all coming up anyway and we rejoice and give thanks because Dave and Sue are believers, they have put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ themselves as their Lord and as their Savior, they see this crucifixion as hugely significant in their lives and the resurrection of Jesus being the evidence of it being an accepted sacrifice and that they have a living relationship with Him and they give this sign of faith to their children also, they love Him and we love Him. Jesus here in this congregation is not rejected, he's worshiped as Lord and Savior, we receive him, we love him and in all our failure, in all our mistakes, in all our misunderstanding, in all our doubt, we know and we appreciate that Jesus has transformed our lives and has brought us hope and a future and that we will live in His presence forever. Amen. Let's put our heads very briefly in prayer. Lord God we ask in prayer that you would bless us now as we move into the baptism, we thank you for it, we thank you that we can sing praise together, that we can rejoice, that we can be part of this wonderful sacrament together, this ordinance that Jesus has given his church and we pray that we would recognize the whole teaching element that is involved in it too for children and our place as a congregation and may we know the grace and the mercy and the love of

God with us as we move through towards the baptism. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.