

Crucifixion!

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[0 : 00] We're going to look back today at the... we're taking a break from... for those of you who normally worship with us on a Sunday morning, we're taking a break from Mark's gospel just for the next couple of weeks as we come towards Easter.

We're going to look at the death of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We're doing that from John's gospel. And this is a really familiar passage. I'm sure it's a really familiar passage to many of us here, especially for Christians.

And we mentioned that Cori and I and whoever's preaching mentions the gospel all the time, mentions the crucifixion all the time, mentions the death of Christ all the time.

But it's ages since we've read it and preached from it. And it's just... it's just so sacred. It's difficult to read.

And it's... you feel, as a preacher, you're on holy ground, that it's almost too holy to even mention and speak about because we've never grasped and we can't grasp its depths and its heights and the amazing reality of it.

[1 : 08] But... and it's... there's far too much in a passage and the event of the cross to deal with in one or a million sermons.

So I'm only going to focus on one very small part of this story today. And to begin with, I'm going to take you to the very beginning of John's gospel to a word you know well.

When John the Baptist sees Jesus, he says the next day, we're told in John 1.29, the next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, Look, or behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And so I'm going to focus on one statement in John 19 where we read from, verse 35 and verse 36. And John says, John, the beloved disciple, he has seen this poor witness, his testimony is true and he knows that he is telling the truth that you may also believe.

[2 : 11] These things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled, not one of his bones will be broken. So that's what we're going to look at today. That Scripture that is prophesied in different places in the Old Testament, including the Psalm that we sung, but also in different places, that his bones would not be broken.

And we'll look at why that is the case. And connect these two incidental verses, behold, the Lamb of God and his bones will not be broken.

And there's a thread that links these two verses from the beginning of John's gospel, the Lamb of God, and the crucifixion, his bones will not be broken.

And it comes in Exodus chapter 12. I'm just going to read some of this, so please follow this because it's the story of the Passover Lamb, or a bit of the story of the Passover Lamb.

If you remember from the Escape from Egypt, we'll speak about it in a moment. And Jesus, just before He died, celebrated the Passover with His disciples and instituted, at the same time, the Lord's Supper.

[3 : 16] So there's a whole lot of connections going on between the Old Testament and the new. And if we're going to understand why his bones weren't broken, we need to understand that He was the Passover.

We need to understand the Passover and the story of the Passover Lamb. So Exodus 12, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, in the land of Egypt, this month shall be for you the beginning of months, it shall be the first month of the year for you.

Tell the congregation of Israel that the tenth day of this month, every man shall take a lamb according to their father's houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and the nearest neighbour shall take according to the number of persons, according

to what each man, what each of you will make your count for the lamb.

Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male, a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the month when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

Then they shall take some of the blood, and they shall put it on the two doorposts on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh of that night, roasted in the fire, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, they shall eat it.

[4 : 25] Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning. Anything that remains until the morning, you shall burn.

And then verse 46 of the same chapter, which says about the lamb, it shall be eaten in one house, you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, you shall not break any of its bones.

Okay, so we're going to look briefly at this Old Testament lamb of God, this Passover lamb where the people were enslaved in Egypt.

And what we have in that account is Moses going down to Egypt speaking with Pharaoh, let my people go because they were enslaved.

And Pharaoh was saying, no, my gods are stronger. And Moses was saying, no, the living God is the only God that there is. And we saw all the plagues that came down on the people in order to change Pharaoh's mind to let the people go.

[5 : 33] But this living God who'd been revealed to Abraham was the only God. And of course it comes to this last plague, the plague of the firstborn, where God will judge the people by destroying the firstborn of Egypt and of Israel unless Israel embraces God's lamb.

Israel must embrace God's Passover lamb that we've read about there. In other words, he was saying to them, you need to recognize that there is only one hope of not being under God's judgment that there's only one solution and there's only one way that you will gain your freedom because they were enslaved.

Not just to release them from the slavery in Egypt, but also to release them from their condemnation and sin before the living God. And that was to accept a sacrificial lamb that would be killed in their stead.

The lamb was God's visual aid. It was to help them understand their need of Him that He loved them and He was their only Savior, okay?

It spoke of His mercy because we're told in the Old Testament that they cried out to God in their enslavement and in their misery and in their hopelessness. And God sent them Moses.

[7 : 05] God gave them a lamb. God told them to take that lamb to sacrifice it, to put the blood on the doors of the lintels. And when the angel of death passed over in that terrifying chapter, He would save and release them from God's judgment.

So it spoke of His mercy. It also spoke of the cost of what He was doing in symbolic ways because we're told it was to be the best lamb that they had. It wasn't just to be a runt from the flock.

It was to be their best lamb, the most priceless, unblemished lamb that was to be used. It was to be whole. It was to be unbroken.

It wasn't to be damaged. It wasn't, you know, to be lame. It was to be the best that they could have, and it was to come into the home. See that small bit?

It was to come into the house with them. You know, they didn't have a, you know, it wasn't a five bedroom, up and down with a kitchen and a dining room. They all kind of lived in the same room, and they would bring the lamb in with them into the home for 14 days.

[8 : 10] Oh, and you can imagine the children, they'd tell they loved the lamb, feeding the lamb, loving the lamb, because lambs are lovely. Sheep are horrible and ugly.

Lambs are nice, aren't they? They're nice. They're like chickens. Chickens are lovely till they become hens, and then they're very ugly. But the lamb was beautiful, and the children loved the lamb. And this is Easter time, and we think about lambs, because we love seeing the lambs skipping, because the children loved the lambs, and the lamb was taken on into the home like a child was fed and looked after.

And then after 14 days, it had to be slaughtered, and it was a visual picture for all in the family, because it was a substitute when the angel of death came.

It was a substitute. Leviticus 17 verse 10 tells us, For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves in the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one's life, because life is in the blood.

You see the symbol, the sacrifice that is being spoken of here that God is revealing to them that He would protect them and protect their lives and protect their firstborn.

[9 : 29] And the firstborn there is very much really, again, a symbol of the most potent sign there can be, isn't there, of our ability to be creative, to create life.

And the firstborn is where we... the firstborn child is the focus of where we foster our love, it's the cradle of hope for the future. But also if something happens to our firstborn, it's just the focus of despair and of life being taken from us.

It's symbolic of really all of us and the life that is reflected in the firstborn.

And to take the life of the firstborn was symbolic of taking... a recognition of the judgment was under all who were there. And so the doorposts were to be covered with His blood, so the angel of death would pass, and the firstborn would be protected, and indeed therefore all of them would be protected.

And this is a prequel. We speak about films, we often have sequels, but we also now increasingly have prequels, the beginning of the story.

[10 : 41] And this is very much a prequel to the main event that we read about in John's Gospel. It's full of shadows of the Old Testament, full of shadows, full of hints, full of pointers, thousands of years before the coming of Jesus Christ.

And the Lamb that was slain whose bones would not be broken is not fulfilled by Christ in the sense that He fulfills what happened in the Old Testament.

Christ is the real event, and these earlier events speak of and point towards Jesus, not the other way around. Jesus doesn't point to the Passover Lamb in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Passover Lamb points forward to, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away this sin of the world, because all of history revolves around Him and revolves around what He did. So you have that Old Testament Lamb that brings us to the New Testament Lamb of God. Behold, the Lamb of God. You know what sense does that make if you just read that cold?

[11 : 41] Well, if someone came in here who had never read anything about the Bible, didn't know anything about Jesus, and he heard this description, be it the Lamb of God, who in the earth has been called the Lamb of God, it makes no sense until we bring it into the context of God's revelation.

And hours before His crucifixion, He sat at the Passover meal, the Passover meal which they enjoyed every year to remember what had happened, allowing the people into the freedom slavery into the promised land, this meal of remembrance.

Because what Jesus is doing, as John says at the beginning of His gospel, He's taking away the sin of the world. You know, all the shed blood of the Old Testament, all the sacrifices, all the Passover lambs, all points towards Jesus Christ.

And it's the core crisis of the world in which we live, is the reality of a world under judgment. Is a world that's broken. We know that. A world that has deserted God, that's what He says.

So the realities of the troubles we face personally, the struggles in the Bible, and the world which we live are relational.

[13 : 04] They're not philosophical. They're not political. They're relational. That we have abandoned. They abandon a relationship with the living God, deserters of God, denied His place, His worship, His friendship.

And all we're left with without Christ are whispers of what has been lost. So you'll rise from here and there'll be glorious whispers that you'll enjoy.

And those who don't know Christ enjoy every day. In beauty, love, music, banquets, newborn, smile of the firstborn or the secondborn or the thirdborn and laughter.

But we can see and understand all these things that all still have a shadow. If we're honest, there's always darkness. There's always death in our hearts and in the world in which we live.

The price that is paid for deserting the author of life. And Jesus comes to take the price for our sins.

[14 : 15] Behold a Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. Nobody is exempt from that. Nobody is outside of that. Many will choose to be outside of that.

Many will reject that they are part of that sentence. But Jesus Christ at the centre of history remains our hope.

And like the Passover Lamb in a much greater way, it's so costly, isn't it? He's spoken of in the Bible as God's firstborn. Not that He was created, not that He was born, but it just speaks of His preeminence of Him symbolizing all that is life.

And God gives, the Father gives, the Son accepts willingly the humiliation of being born in Mary's womb and living. He humbles Himself.

He lives among us like the Lamb lived among the family to be examined for its purity and to be loved for the few days it was there. So Christ came among us and lived a life and showed Himself and showed Himself to be perfect, the perfect substitute for us.

[15:24] And His unparalleled love and commitment continued to give and give and give even when He was rejected, celebrated on a donkey coming in on Palm Sunday, crucified the next week because He was a rotten Savior to those who rejected Him.

And He's this great Lamb of God that is spoken of in Peter who speaks about Him for, you know, it's not with perishable things that you're saved, but with the precious blood of Christ.

What does He say, a Lamb without blemish or defect? Same thing. Bones were not broken, Lamb without blemish.

Without any failing or anything that takes away from His perfection and the broken bones speaks of that in this crucifixion story, it speaks of Him being the whole perfect, unblemished sacrifice of God given without any failing in Him to be our substitute.

And you know, there's something else in the broken bones I think that doesn't necessarily come from the Old Testament picture of the perfect Lamb that was unbroken.

[16:47] And maybe I'm wrong in this, but I think it could be significant. Is that it speaks of the fact that what Jesus did was entirely voluntary.

Entirely voluntary. Where's the connection? These bones were not broken because just before the Jews wanted all the crucified men to have their bones broken so they would die before the Sabbath because it was unclean to be hanging on the cross on the Sabbath.

Just before that on the Saturday or Friday night it would have been Sabbath was the Saturday.

Jesus said, it's finished. The work is done.

It's completed. He enters His Sabbath rest before the actual physical Sabbath. And He chose to lay down His life.

There's a very important verse in John chapter 10 verse 8, 17, 8 where Jesus says, I think we often forget this, I think we think that Jesus died, but it's something much more significant.

[18:03] We're told Jesus says, the reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.

Listen, no one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

No one in history has ever said that and no one in history has ever done that except Jesus Christ. Now, He chose to lay down His life and to take it up again.

He wasn't killed. He wasn't a victim. There's been no other death like Jesus. He finished His work. The darkness was on the cross, the three hours of darkness.

That's where He subsumed and took our hell and judgment on Himself. And He said at the end of that, it's finished. But in order to fully fulfill His role of having defeated death and evil, He gave Himself to death.

[19:05] Devil didn't take it. Death didn't take it. He gave Himself over in our place. He wasn't to be killed by human hands.

The breaking of His bones would have hastened His death. Interestingly, it was probably, in many ways, an act of mercy, a cold mercy certainly.

But it was an act of mercy because it did hasten death. And if you were on the cross, that was a good thing. You didn't want to die the death of a cross any longer than you could possibly suffer.

So He wasn't even given that act of mercy. There was no mercy for Him. He said it was finished.

He didn't need anyone to hasten His death. He didn't need any act of cold mercy. He didn't need to be under the brutal invitations of the Jews to somehow fulfill a cold ritual of the dead not being on the cross on the Sabbath day.

[20 : 19] He chose to die. He said it's finished. And that remains entirely relevant in our understanding of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. So today, it's also far away, isn't it?

Twenty-first century, top of the royal mile in Edinburgh, time geographically, culturally, socially, in a world that we live in today which at least regards this truth of a crucified Savior at best to be something you just keep to yourself as a private belief.

The private belief of a marginalized few, or at worst, it's the exposure of a dangerous faith that needs to be eradicated altogether. No place in a modern society, a modern liberal way of thinking. We have these extremes, and it's tough. But we're called to consider the reality of good and evil and life and death and hope and despair that marks every single one of our lives.

And to ask if there is ultimate truth. And if Jesus is who He claimed to be, then time, geography and culture and society doesn't change that. And we need to be bold and courageous and stand up as Christians for that.

[21 : 33] And there'll be apologetic in the wrong sense of that. There'll be embarrassed by it because it's the greatest news ever. You know Jesus came to see you, he said, hey, I came to bring good news. It's great news for us.

You know, yeah, there's solemnity and all of course there is, but it's great, good news. That is why Jesus came. It's the greatest revelation of love that there ever has been.

Because it's divine love, the Lamb of God. He becomes the forsaken one. He experiences our hell of desertion, our death of separation, He becomes sin.

The living one dies. Unfathomable mystery in that truth for us. It's as deep as the ocean, but it's as simple as giving someone who's dying of thirst a cup of cold water.

God the Father giving His preeminent Son. The whispers of which we see in Abraham in the Passover and in Mary and all that happened to their firstborn sons.

[22 : 29] The deep, deep mystery of the shepherd, John 10, becoming the Lamb of John 10.

If it's new to you, please examine it. If you're complacent about it, please think it again and consider what he's saying. It's not just for odd people like Simon reminded us last week.

We're all weird. But it's for all of us, we need Him. We need this substitute. We are faced with a fragile death as we hold a firstborn or as we hold a child and all the hope of a child, the children we have with us, as we remember that we were children, all of us, and we're the subject of great hope. All that they embody of life and of love and of hope and of ambition and dreams and potential, all that we hold to be good, yet we know as we grow, and sometimes not even until we grow, we experience a growing darkness that casts a shadow.

There's brokenness and bruisedness and there's a letdown and our hearts are disordered, there's fracture, division, tears, guilt, abuse.

[23 : 51] But insecure mortal's at best and sometimes we just want to just crush it all and ignore it and just live for the day.

But we do know we fall short of our own standards. How much more will we fall short of God's, the living God, and yet how much He has done to set us free to live for Him.

The only living being who came, who was born in order to die, and the only living being who died of his own volition and who took his life up again, not for himself, but for you and for me.

And it needs, as I finish with this, it needs to get personal for all of us. It does, it's not generic, it's not just for everybody in the sense that it doesn't matter what we think and do, that it has to get personal.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, 7 talking about using the image of the Passover that we don't have time to go into. He says, get rid of the old yeast, because you know it was unleavened bread they used. I'm not going to lie, that was the case, great symbolism there.

[25 : 12] So you can eat the new unleavened batch as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. See how personal it becomes?

You need to say my Passover lamb. Jesus is my substitute. Jesus is the blood and the lentils of our lives that He has to represent.

That's why the Passover was a meal, you know, because they ate the meat and they didn't leave anything behind. And so the Lord's support in the New Testament symbolism of that or fulfillment of that is a meal we eat, you know.

I've said it so often here, I've never said any new here, but no one else can eat for you. You don't go to a restaurant and have a lovely meal and just give it to someone else to eat.

You can't do that. We eat because we need nourish ourselves. It's the most personal thing we do, eating and drinking. No one else can do it for us. And so Jesus says, take, eat.

[26 : 13] This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. You hear a lot today in the site we live in about expressive individualism today, you know, that everything's about the individual, everything's about how we feel, if it's good for me.

Now that has gone to the nth degree, of course, but it's disordered truth.

It's not wrong in the sense that we are unique and that God calls us into a personal relationship with Him. And the most, the greatest, most responsible individual act you ever do is to recognize your responsibility before the living God as an individual and come and accept His greatest gift in Christ. Glorious resurrection to eternal life, which Corrie will look at next Sunday. What a great Sunday next week is going to be. Well, every Sunday is resurrection Sunday. I know that. We know that here.

That's why we're featured, because we worship and we celebrate the resurrection every single Sunday when we come together, every Sunday is Easter Sunday for us, but we remember especially on Easter Sunday because it's important what a great Sunday next week will be.

[27 : 34] Adult baptism, child baptisms, Lord supper in the evening service. What a bonus, what a day. I hope you're already looking forward to it. Chomping at the bit for next Sunday to come and worship and to know His blessing.

In Christ, a glorious resurrection to life in which we share. Why don't you take someone along next week? Take someone with you.

Go on. Be courageous. Be bold. Take someone along to hear about the greatest man who ever lived and died and rose again for us.

Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that You would help us to know You better. What unbelievable depth is in this passage.

We barely, we barely even touched it. We looked at one verse, one bit of one verse, and yet every single syllable is jam-packed full of unbelievable truth, of astonishing reality, of fulfilled prophecy.

[28 : 44] Lord did we notice how often in that passage John says, in order that Scripture might be fulfilled, the pattern is all there, the picture is all there, the plan is all there.

Nothing happened on the cross that was incidental, that was governed or overseen by men. It was all part of Your glorious, mysterious, simple, committed, sacrificial, loving act on our behalf.

Lord may we as Christians today be utterly grateful and see more clearly. And if there are any here today who don't know You or don't love You or don't understand You or are angry with You or reject You, Lord, I simply ask that Your Holy Spirit will touch their hearts and help them to see things in a new light today that they may have not seen before.

We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.