

Christ's Passion...

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[0 : 00] On the 13th of May 1940, the newly appointed prime minister addressed a packed house of commons that had been hastily recalled with these words.

I would like to say to the house, as I said to those who have joined the government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say it is to wage war by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us.

To wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalog of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim?

I can answer in one word, victory. Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be.

[1 : 01] For without victory there is no survival. With these words Winston Churchill addressed a nation, a nation that was frightened, a nation that was terrified, and a nation that desperately needed hope, desperately needed a sense that no matter how dark, no matter how desperate, that better days could possibly be ahead.

And as the wartime leader he said, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. But one thing was obvious. It was quite impossible that one man, no matter how gifted, one man no matter how impassioned, no matter how equipped for the job and for the time, it was impossible to suggest that one person could turn the tide.

In fact it would cost the whole country its effort, its toil, its sweat, its tears. It would cost the toil, sweat, tears of all the nations of the allies to overcome this great foe.

Nothing could be done overnight. It would in fact take more than six years for the empire of Japan and the Nazi government to be overcome by the allies. So it's impossible isn't it, that one person could achieve such an effect.

By all means we can offer our blood and our sweat and our toil and our tears. But one person cannot do this on their own.

[2 : 32] Nineteen hundred years earlier there too was blood and toil and sweat and tears. But in this particular scene of which we read it was in fact one man whose blood and whose toil and whose sweat and whose tears turned the tide against all the power of darkness, against all the power of death, against all the power of evil.

So it was Jesus Christ in his passion that achieved for us now and throughout all past centuries. This greatest of all gifts, this greatest of all victories, he had this single-minded goal, this single-minded aim that he came to this world on a mission. And he came to do two things. He came to seek and he came to save. Why? Because he came to a world that was lost. A world that had lost its way, a world that had lost its direction to people who didn't know and who didn't understand and who did not respond.

And this morning when I was asked to preach I was given a topic and the topic was the passion of Jesus. This is an interesting word because if we do use the word passion today we tend to use it generically.

[3 : 52] We would describe any strong outburst of emotion, positive or negative. Maybe it could be the passion of two people who are in love. Maybe it could be the passion of a supporter for a particular team when they scored a goal or even an outburst when the other team scored against them.

But this word draws its heritage from old Latin through old French into old English and particularly described Jesus.

It was at first a theological term before it became an emotional term. And it described those series of events primarily in those final days of the life of Jesus Christ.

Because the key that the theologians, the thinkers of their day they recognized as the gospel authors recognized that these events are absolutely critical in understanding the message of the Bible.

66 books, it's an encyclopedia. But these events in the last week of Jesus are absolutely critical for understanding who he is, understanding what he has done and connecting those events to us.

[5 : 06] And if you read in the four gospel accounts you'll see that each gospel writer slows down. Now Jesus lived for 33 years, Jesus has earthly ministry for three years, but almost half or a third to a half of each of the gospel accounts deals with this seven day period.

Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Why? Because those events were absolutely foundational. And with you this morning I'd like to highlight three events that we read and to see very clearly the passion of Jesus Christ, the suffering of Jesus, the deliberate agony on the part of Jesus, what he experienced and to ask and hopefully answer the question why?

Why did he do it? Why did he allow it to happen? Why did he place himself in such a position? The first scene, Palm Sunday, Luke captures that for us in Luke chapter 19.

Page 1054 you have the scene that is unequalled in the life of Jesus. As you read in the gospels very often Jesus had those who received the blessings, those who received the healings, he told them to be quiet.

He often said that his hour had not come. But obviously now his hour had come because the whole city was in uproar, the whole city was celebrating.

[6 : 38] There was this massive welcome on a scale that is unequalled in any other portion of the gospels. The triumphal entry, Palm Sunday.

But Luke captures something unique. Each of the four gospel writers is different. Each has a different angle. Each takes something of the events and shapes and presents them for us uniquely. And Luke captures this scene in verse 41. After the celebration, after the hosannas, after the praising, we read in verse 41 as he, Jesus, approached Jerusalem and saw the city he wept over it. The tears of Jesus are well known. The shortest verse in the Bible in John's gospel, John chapter 11, Jesus wept and there and here, this is an expression of deep and of powerful and of personal upset of great sorrow of heart.

And it's not just a tear that might trickle down the side of your cheek, but it would be one who would be bursting into tears, one who would be shedding copious tears as an expression, a visible expression of something that was deep within the heart.

[7 : 56] And you ask, why? Why is he weeping? Why is he lamenting? Why is he upset? Today is the day of greatest victory. Today is the day when it seems like finally everybody gets it.

Everybody realizes who he is. Everybody acknowledges Jesus as the conquering king. We read, he approaches the city, he weeps over it and then he explains.

If you, even you had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side.

Jesus had the ability, which we don't. Jesus had the ability to see clearly what is in the future. He knew what lay ahead. He also could see very clearly the present in a way that we can't see the present.

Jesus had the uncanny ability of seeing through and understanding the reality of people's hearts, the reality of people's lives. And he recognized, as we will soon see in the gospel accounts, that the Hosannas and the blessed as he who comes in the name of the Lord would soon in five days give way to crucify.

[9 : 13] And he could also see that within a few years, within a generation, that this great city of Jerusalem, this great temple, this great center of worship would be utterly and completely destroyed.

And he cried. He was full of anguish. He was full of emotion because he saw a place and he saw a people and he knew what was ahead.

So what does that say? It says that Jesus, when he sees human suffering, either the present or the future, he is moved by that suffering. He is not dispassionate.

He is not removed, but he is passionate and involved. So if something is bothering you, if something is troubling you, if something is causing you grief or anxiety or discomfort, please know that it causes him discomfort, anxiety.

He doesn't step back, but he enters in. And if you're a believer in Jesus, if you're not a believer in Jesus, know that he cares. Know that he's interested. Know that he feels.

[10:20] He doesn't look upon a city and say you're getting exactly what you deserve. He doesn't look upon the city and its people saying, you miss the mark, you've fallen short of the standard, you haven't recognized the time.

He goes on to say, when the destruction of Jerusalem comes, they will dash you to the ground. You and the children within your walls, they will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.

The Roman Empire had great skills. They could build roads, they could enact laws, they could organize a vast empire. But when push came to shove, the Romans were good at punishing those who opposed them with a powerful expression, with a powerful demonstration as to who was in charge.

70 AD, you can read for yourself the account. There was a rebellion in Jerusalem and the Romans stepped in and not one stone was left upon another.

Not one inhabitant of Jerusalem was left alive. Why? Because the people had chosen to rebel against an empire that was far more powerful and that empire determined to show them who was boss.

[11:32] So Jesus can see. Jesus can see your life today. Jesus knows the today, the pain or the anxiety, the fear, the uncertainty. He sees it and he responds to it.

He also sees the future and he sees this world in which we live and he can see the places of famine. He can see the places of poverty. He can see the places of war and violence.

He can see into the individual hearts and into the families and into the lives and he is moved by what he sees. You see, there is that day coming.

There is a day coming when destruction will take place, when all that we see will be no more. And Jesus knows that the day is coming when he will return. And when that day comes, history as we know it, our individual life history or the history of this world will come to a dramatic conclusion.

And the great concern that Jesus had then and has now is that so many people don't realize, so many people don't understand. John chapter one, the preamble to John's gospel, we're told that Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

[12:41] He came to the world, the world that he had created, but the world did not recognize him. And he's saying to this city in his tears and in his words that they simply don't get it.

They simply haven't figured it out. They simply haven't recognized that now was the time that he was the answer. And he cries tears, sheds, shows this very powerful and this very personal emotion.

So maybe this morning you feel that nobody cares. And maybe you feel that nobody is interested and maybe you feel that no one understands. Well, please know that Jesus does. He knows, he understands and he cares individually, collectively.

The second scene, the sweat, sweat of blood, sweat like blood. This is in chapter 22. When Jesus is praying on the Mount of Olives.

If we go from Palm Sunday, we're now at some point in the evening of Thursday. This was the day in which Jesus had celebrated Passover. And you can read for yourself all that is happening.

[13:52] You can read of the betrayal of Judas. You can read of the prediction of Peter's denial. A lot is happening. A lot is taking place. And each of the gospel authors is recording this detail with great precision.

And now we have this scene, again, a very vivid and a very powerful scene. Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives in verse 39 and his disciples followed him.

On reaching the place, he said to them, pray that you will not fall into temptation. He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done.

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Whether this is symbolic language that his sweat appeared like blood or whether it was literal that his sweat actually became blood, the doctors among you can tell you that it is possible, not common but possible, that in times of extreme anxiety, extreme stress, that some of the small blood vessels can burst causing the sweat that would come out of the pores to be accompanied with blood.

[15:13] But the main point here is anguish. We move from sorrow and we move to anguish. Why? Because he is confronting the reality of what will soon take place.

He knows that there is a cup that he will drink and that he will drink to the very bottom. And that cup is the cup of God's wrath or God's displeasure because Jesus is placing himself in that position where he pays a price, where he satisfies a debt, where he receives all that is due to another. Now that is a place that no one would choose, no one would wish to choose, no one would want to be there. And Jesus in fact says, if you are willing, take this cup.

If you are willing, Father. But he recognizes that it's the will of the Father that must be done. I remember many times growing up and my father often said to me, he said, you don't know the value of money.

Probably didn't then, probably still don't now. But I remember so many times my mistakes cost him. My only car that I had growing up was a Chevy Citation and I remember not stopping at the appropriate time when the person in front of me did so.

[16:33] The front of the Citation and the back of the other car was damaged. Now it was my dad that bailed me out because he had the money and I didn't. So I didn't fully appreciate the cost.

I realized the mistake, but I didn't pay the price. He did. And you see, we can't really appreciate the cost. We can't really appreciate the anguish and the anxiety here because we can't enter into what Jesus entered into.

Sometimes we can glimpse something. Sometimes we can appreciate something of the life of Jesus. But here is a place that we can just look on in wonder because what lay ahead for Jesus was of extreme anxiety.

That place of crucifixion was not just a place of physical suffering, not just a place of emotional suffering, but it was a place of spiritual separation and a place of incredible convergence of the anger of a righteous God towards the rebellious people, of the darkness, the physical darkness of the land and the spiritual darkness, the reality of death, the reality of evil, the reality of sin placed in one place at one time and the burden fell fully upon him, the weight fell fully upon his shoulders and the sweat dropped like blood.

So the tears that he shed over Jerusalem, the blood that was sweat like blood here on the Mount of Olives the Thursday evening before crucifixion.

[18:10] And then we come to the main experience of the crucifixion itself in Luke chapter 23. And this is where the blood flowed.

In Luke's Gospel at Luke 23 and 32, two other men, both criminals were also led out with him to be executed when they came to the place called the skull there they crucified him.

And it's interesting in the gospels it's very minimal. We don't get much of a description of the actual event. We know of the beating, we know of the crown of thorns, we know of the cross that he had to carry, but very often it's just simply described here as they crucified him.

In fact, as I said earlier, it's to the Psalms that you would go or to the prophets to Isaiah to get an insight into the internal feelings, into the internal workings, the emotions, the thoughts of Jesus. But simply here we're told they crucified him. Jesus was crucified. The Romans again had many great achievements, but one of their greatest achievements was punishing evil doers.

[19:23] And the cross crucifixion was a great way of demonstrating A, the power of Rome, and B, the penalty for rebellion. And that's why the criminals would have a sign over the cross so that you could identify not just who they were, but you could identify what they did.

So the idea is you do this, you get this. Pretty simple, pretty powerful, pretty direct statement from the Romans saying, we're in charge here.

If you disobey, if you cross this line, this is the punishment and this is the penalty. This extreme punishment, this extreme pain, this extreme cost was simply described they crucified him.

Now the scene is hard for us to grasp the blood, the anguish, the physical, the emotional, the spiritual, the mocking, the jeers from the passers-by, from the priests, from those who were near the cross, the soldiers who were looking on.

We get glimpses of the scene, but it's really impossible for us to take in. But suffice it to say that there Jesus bled and there Jesus died, that he not only cried over the city, that he not only sweated blood at the Mount of Olives, but he bled and he died on the cross.

[20 : 50] So this is the full measure of his devotion. This is the full measure of his commitment. So he doesn't just say it, he doesn't just promise it or pledge it. He says it and he delivers it.

Jesus accompanied with words, a powerful combination. Jesus as the greatest ever preacher practices what he preaches. He preaches a message of love and he demonstrates his love. He preaches a message of divine judgment, of divine satisfaction, of redemption, but he doesn't just preach redemption, he redeems. He doesn't just talk about a price to be paid, he pays it. He doesn't just talk about the consequence of sin, he takes the consequence of sin on himself personally. So these are the events, the sweat, the tears, the blood.

There was one word else that Churchill used and that was toil, another word for work. The whole life of Jesus was a life of work.

[21 : 49] His whole earthly experience was of fulfilling the will of his father, of doing what he was told to do, doing what he was sent to do. And when we hear this work, we often think, right, that's where I come in.

When I think of work, that's what I need to do. You tell me what Jesus has done and then you tell me what I have to do. But we see in the Gospel accounts that all the work is his.

All the effort is his, all the commitment is his, all the cost is his. So how do we fit this together and where do we come into this picture? Because we can glimpse the inner turmoil.

We can glimpse the physical pain and we can grasp something of the events. Now if you're a regular participant or regular visitor here, a regular member of this congregation, you'll understand. You see that there is a thread that runs through the Bible. There's a key theme that unites the whole of the Bible together, Old Testament and New Testament Gospels and Letters. And that theme is called the Gospel, the Good News concerning Jesus Christ.

[22 : 54] And maybe if you're a visitor here this morning, maybe if you're not a regular at St. Columbus, let me take a moment to explain this. Because all that I've done in a few moments is explain the what.

This is what happened. To give a little bit of background, to give a little bit of explanation, to try to explain what's going on here. But you could easily, and I hope you are asking the why question. Why? Because if you know anything about Jesus, you know that he's the Son of God. If you know anything about Jesus, you know that he stands out as being the greatest teacher that ever taught, the greatest leader who ever led, the greatest example of what it means to be a person. He lived a life without blemish. He lived a perfect life of obedience. And the question is why? Why does this man who did nothing wrong? Why does this Jesus who has no sin, no guilt, no culpability, why is it he that does this?

And the only answer is found in the Gospel. That what we see here is the fulfillment of that great promise. That great pledge that was given his way back as Genesis chapter 3, that the seed of the woman would one day crush the head of the serpent.

[24 : 09] That somehow, some way, God would solve this great problem that occurred there in Genesis chapter 3. This great sin problem, this great rebellion problem, this great problem that alienates us from God, that alienates us from each other, and even alienates us from ourselves.

That Jesus has come on a mission, seeking and saving. So that's why we need to listen to what Jesus prayed. And that's why we need to listen to what Jesus promised because only in his prayer and only in his promise can we make sense of what's going on here.

Luke chapter 23 at verse 34. Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. So the death of Jesus has something inextricably linked to forgiveness.

That his suffering, his blood, his sweat, his toil, his tears are inextricably linked to forgiveness. And it's God who alone can forgive. And it's Jesus who alone provides forgiveness because of what he has done on the cross.

So Jesus says to us today, we need forgiveness. We need a new start. We need a clean slate. We need God to take away that guilt, that shame, that blemish.

[25 : 29] We need God to take away that list of offenses. Those things that we have done that we shouldn't have done, those things that we shouldn't have done that we have done.

And then listen to the promise of Jesus. This is right at the very end of that passage that we read in verse 43. Just speaking to one of the criminals, I tell you the truth.

Today, you will be with me in paradise. So there's something about these events that opens the way to a place called paradise.

The language here is quite remarkable. Jesus is using a word that appeared only a few times in the Old Testament, but it wasn't a Hebrew word. It was actually a word from Persia, from modern day Iran.

And it was a word that spoke of a garden, not just any garden, but a magnificent garden, a garden of great beauty, a garden that you would associate with a king or with a queen. So if you think of the royal garden, the royal gardens at cue, massive scale, beautiful plants, beautiful flowers.

[26 : 31] And he uses this language to describe what heaven is like. So the why? Why did Jesus suffer? Why did Jesus die? Why did he cry? Why did he sweat blood?

Why did he shed his blood on the cross? And why did he work so hard? The answer is he wants us to be forgiven, and he wants us to be with him in paradise.

The thief on the cross was guilty as charged. He admitted it. The thief on the cross was getting his just punishment. He admitted it. And he turns to Jesus, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Now here's the connection. Here's the connection between us and Jesus, that we need to turn to him. We need to trust in him. We need to cry out to him or call out to him. And that can be out loud with our voice.

It could be in the silence of our heart. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, I recognize you as a king. And I recognize you as my king.

[27 : 30] I recognize you as one who was opening away where there was no way, opening a door that was once shut. And I want to go with you. I want to be with you.

Jesus says, today you will be with me in paradise. So what did Jesus do? And why did Jesus do it? We need that new start which forgiveness brings.

And we need that path open to a place called paradise. And that place called paradise is where Jesus is and where his people are or will be because of what he has done.

He has offered everything. He has provided everything. He has done everything. The blood and the toil and the tears and the sweat are his. And all the benefits and all the blessings and all the good gifts are ours through faith.

And if you want to see how, remember what the thief did. The thief recognized the problem. The thief recognized his own personal guilt. And the thief on the cross turned to Jesus personally and genuinely.

[28 : 37] Jesus, remember me. May God bless his word to us and may God strengthen us in our faith and may God equip us in turn to bring this message of hope, this message of comfort and this message of forgiveness to a world that desperately needs hope.

Amen. Now our final.