

The Weeping King

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[0 : 00] I really wanted, and actually this passage and the quotation from Jeremiah was actually the trigger for me doing this series.

It was what brought the whole concept of thinking of the king and the forgotten king into my mind for thinking through this series. So this was the genesis of the series, so I'm going to do it.

And it's entitled The Weeping King, okay? And it might not seem very appropriate for Christmas, just about Christmas Eve, but actually it couldn't be more appropriate.

And it is absolutely essential that we have the balance as we think of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. So I know you always give me a hard time for greeting in church.

And I probably will today, I'm just going to say that already. I probably will, so don't mock me for my emotion, okay? But I hope to bring it around, obviously, to the great gospel and the hope of the gospel.

[1 : 11] Because I remember very vividly one day, before any of these youngsters who are here today was born in 1996, 13th of March, 1996, I remember it well, because it was the deadliest mass shooting in British history, 16 children and one teacher in Dumblane, the perpetrator, Thomas Hamilton, shot himself.

It was what triggered a whole raft of changes in law, apart from anything else. But I really remember, you know, sometimes you remember a significant event or a terrible event, a tragedy, you remember, where you were.

I remember exactly what I was. I was driving from visiting someone in hospital in Inverness, back to the parish, the area that I lived in.

We lived in at that time in Roskeen. And the radio was on, so you were always listening to the radio in the car. And it was, I was completely oblivious to the journey.

I had no memory of getting from A to B. I simply remember being absolutely engulfed in this live broadcast from Parliament following the shooting in Dumblane.

[2 : 38] And it was a hugely moving series of messages from members of Parliament at that time to the MP for Dumblane.

His name was Michael Forsythe. I can't remember his second name, Michael Forsythe, who was MP at that time for Parliament. But I'll never forget when the Reverend Ian Paisley, who was the member of Parliament for North Antrim, and he was much more often quoted for his fiery comments about the troubles in Northern Ireland.

As he was a minister, he was all at an MP, and he was a very powerful MP at that time during the troubles in Northern Ireland. But he spoke, and I remember him speaking so powerfully at that time.

And I've quoted from the Hansard Records, great grief is never great at talking.

It is not words but tears and a sob and a heartbreak. This house has today reflected that more than I have ever seen in many years that I've sat in it.

[4 : 03] When I heard about the tragedy, I thought of the text of Scripture that says, Rachel, weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were not.

Today, I think of those who weep for their children and cannot be comforted because they are not. That text comes from the Old Testament prophecy and holds out a great hope.

I heard against the wickedness of this crime, I hear the words of the Savior who said, Suffer the little children to come to me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.

I trust that faith and that hope will cast a beautiful rainbow over this terrible valley of tears.

I've never forgotten that. I've never forgotten the power and the silence of the people of, or the members that were sitting in the House of Parliament.

[5 : 04] And every time I've read that passage, it's always reminded me of that day. And for us, we have to recognise and appreciate that that sadness is at the very core of the incarnation.

It's at the very core of it. The deepest heartbreak births the greatest hope. And that, we're not, we can't be simplistic and we can't simply ignore these realities because it's right in the text and it's right at the very heart of the Nativity Story.

We don't hear many songs about it and we don't sing carols about it and it's very seldom mentioned, but it's right at the heart of the Bible Story. It's right at the heart of what is happening here, that we can't avoid the tyranny of evil.

It's simply impossible for us to avoid, even in the sweetest and most beautiful of all biblical stories, the story of the Nativity.

Because in this place of the greatest good, we see the greatest evil because we recognise, okay, philosophically, think about it for a moment, evil only exists in opposition to good.

[6 : 29] It is not a free-standing reality. It is only there because of good. It is a leech that seeks to destroy everything that is good.

I know there's much that's inexplicable and irrational about evil and its origins, but it stalks our lives and it's the deepest mystery for us all, which the Incarnation speaks into and which Jesus comes to defeat.

And we see it and we recognise it. We see it here and we recognise it in our lives. It divides, it separates, it breaks trust, it pits one person against another, it destroys what should be together, and its final outrage is death.

And that's not simply something that is outside of ourselves. It's not something that's just distant or that we can blame on society or on our parliamentarians or on our world powers.

It's not simply impersonal forces. It's not even simply satanic darkness that we recognise. Because if we are honest with ourselves today, it's an outrage we see in the ugliness of our own consciousness, of our own thoughts, of our own hearts, and in our own actions.

[7 : 53] We see it in life's sadnesses, in loss, in grief, in mortality. It's all pervasive. It's everywhere.

It's absolutely central to our existence. And as I mentioned earlier, we can't even ignore it in the nativity story.

I know we do, and I know we don't want to, but it's there, and it's not good for us to avoid it.

Because in the birth of Jesus, with this remarkable angelic annunciation of Jesus coming, there's this eruption of evil at the birth of Jesus.

Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought about the immense eruption of evil that is triggered by the birth of Jesus?

It's unnatural, isn't it? It's strange. And it's because of who Jesus is.

[9 : 06] Absolute goodness. The crazed actions of King Herod. There's very seldom been someone like King Herod in a position of power as there was then.

He was a cruel and an evil despot. He killed thousands of people in his life, absolutely gratuitously. He did it with a snap of his finger.

He loved killing people. He was an absolute maniac. He was paranoid about his own position and his own power. He murdered thousands of people, including his own wife, his uncle, his sons.

He was a brute, an absolute brute. And you know, some people have looked at the historians and say, well, there's no account of the killing of the young boys in Bethlehem. It's not historical.

It's just fabled. Not so... the historians of the day wouldn't have regarded this event as anything out of the ordinary.

[10 : 06] Worth recording, it was only probably, in their eyes, thirty or thirty-five young boys, small rural place. It wasn't worth recording.

He was used to killing thousands at a time. That would have been worthy of a report in the Daily Mail of the Day, but not this. Caesar Augustus was his friend, and he's reputed to have said, I would rather be Herod's pig than his son.

There was more chance of a pig surviving in Herod's household than his son. He was horrific. And he ordered the massacre of all of these young boys in the area of Bethlehem, up to two years old.

Brutal but typical. He was wanting to erase the threat of this young king that the wise men had spoken to him about, and that he had a fond interest in when they were in his company.

He wanted to erase Jesus and King Jesus from his consciousness and from being the threat that they thought he would be. And of course, along with that very physical brutality of King Herod, there

doesn't, in any way, deny his responsibility, but there is also a deeper spiritual undertone at work here.

[11 : 30] There's a deeper evil. Can you think of another biblical story that reflects this one? There is another one.

It's reflected of another despot, not a Jewish king but an Egyptian pharaoh who massacred baby boys in Egypt, maybe for a slightly different reason, but in the end, to make sure there wasn't a threat to his power and a threat to his authority.

And Jesus' flight takes him to Egypt so that another prophecy that comes out of Egypt, I have called my son, is fulfilled with Jesus coming back from Egypt and returning to fulfill a greater rescue than what Moses was able to fulfill for the people who were brought out of Egypt.

Moses came not to release us from a physical slavery or from a cultural despot but from spiritual death and slavery to sin.

So we find even in these accounts a tremendous parallel and a tremendous unity and a tremendous focus between the shadowy, anticipatory events of the Old Testament that are pointing us to what Jesus has come to do and even the horror and the darkness of the powers of evil who wanted to destroy this child, this child that God predicted in Genesis chapter 3 would crush the serpent's head and the serpent from that moment sought to destroy every evidence.

[13 : 14] And you see it right through the Old Testament with the destruction of the Jews, the Esther, the captivity to all kinds of things which were satanic at the very lowest, deepest, most profound level, the powers of darkness seeking to circumvent the coming of this great Messiah.

But can you imagine these days? Can you imagine the overwhelming family grief?

Every child under two in this place gone. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine the desperate, desperate personal tragedy that lies behind this account?

The mothers unable to be comforted because of what was happening and what was being experienced.

And the quote comes from Jeremiah and the original context where we were reading it from was Jeremiah speaking into the exile of the people of Israel from the promised land they were being taken out of the promised land into slavery, into captivity because of their own rebellion and their own turning away from the living God.

[14 : 33] And it seems to be, most commentators think that they would have been, as they were taken out of the promised land, they would have been led past Rachel's grave.

Rachel who was really symbolic of being the mother of Israel, you know, Jacob's true love, the mother of Benjamin representing God's covenant people.

And it's a symbolic picture of her weeping, unable to be comforted as she sees her people led out of the promised land into captivity, brutalized, enslaved and losing what they'd been promised because of their own choices.

And that's the picture that it's a family picture. It's a very powerful family picture. I'll go on to speak about the hope that comes from it very shortly.

And yet God uses that because that's the deepest grief of all, isn't it? It's the deepest division of all is losing a child or the breakup of a family.

[15 : 49] That's where satanic darkness and the effects of sin in our own lives wreak the most havoc. With the strongest bonds of love, with the greatest good is affected by the deepest division and darkness.

So as a brief aside, you know, and that prayer from Scotty Smith was focused on that. Remember, you know, at this time of year, you know, everything is focused on, you know, celebration and joy and presence and, you know, all the adverts and everything else.

And we do, and rightly so, rightly so we should and we must. But also as believers as Christians, we mustn't be insensitive and we mustn't be obsessive about our own happiness.

Remember those for whom this time of year is particularly difficult. Remember the refugees in our city here, the Syrian families, the estranged, those who sense loneliness, loss, brutality, slavery, slavery, despair.

And remember that for many the tensions of life will be exacerbated in many homes over Christmas and in Christmas Day. They'll be highlighted, they'll be exposed.

[17 : 09] People in debt, people who are faced up with their broken dreams and their memories, as well as all of us with the ordinary strains and stresses of parenthood and of disappointment of

depression.

It was ever thus. But let's remember that to be sensitive and to bring others into our joy and celebration and into all that we know and appreciate and are thankful for, as we mentioned, no, we didn't mention it.

I'm going to preach it next week. So prophetic. What's happening next week? Okay. But yeah, I will. It's just that I've prepared already. But I don't want to be a miserable old curmudgeon, okay?

And so while thinking of these things, we change our focus. But the one thing we need to do as Christians, as believers, is face reality, don't we?

We need to be realistic. Our celebrations, our joy, our happiness, our family times, all that we are need to be rooted in reality, and the reality that Jesus is saving us from and the reality that is redeemed by Him to make us people who love God first and love one another, and not just when it's easy, but particularly looking out with shepherd's eyes to those who are less fortunate in their experiences than we are.

[18 : 44] But in the reality, it reminds us that this is the reason for the season. It's not be completely consumed by the consumerist sentimentality fest that is Christmas, which is sometimes emptied of all its goodness.

Let us focus on Jesus Christ. So we come towards the conclusion by shouting for joy at the greatest hope that we have in the midst of this.

Now you might look at this passage, you will, I actually don't see much joy in this passage. Well, it's broader as part of the nativity, but it's also reflected in Jeremiah where we read Jeremiah chapter 31.

If you remember, we read about that initial prophecy that's given, but we also read on a little bit further, which reminds us that, thus says the Lord, keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the Lord.

They shall come back from the land of the enemy, there is hope for your future. And then he goes on to, is Ephraim not my family image? Is Ephraim not my dear son? Is he my darling child?

[19 : 55] For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still, therefore my heart yearns for him. I will surely have mercy on him. So there's our hope, there's our joy. As we link the Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament reality, we see the significance and the importance of what was happening.

Even in this judgment of captivity, God was saying, I'm going to bring you back, and the Savior will come from the remnant, and He will be the one who will bring absolute joy. I haven't forgotten you. You are my child. And there's this whole familial concept with God as our Father, reaching out with Jesus as the Son to redeem His people back to us.

And that is revealed in the birth of Jesus, at this great nativity scene, the angels telling us about the light of the world and the darkness of the evil of the surrounding events that are so tragic and brutal. On Tuesday night, we were at the concert down in Carrabber's, Sarah Groves' concert is a Christian singer. And she was speaking very beautifully.

[21 : 06] She's an artist and she's a musician and she's a poet, so she speaks very beautifully about things. And she painted a beautiful word picture of what she felt that the angels wanted to do when they heard about the purpose and plan of God to send Jesus.

He said, oh, please, they went into God's presence and said, please, let us just give a fanfare and tell the whole world, this is amazing news. God said, no, no, you can't, not yet, not now.

Please, please let us go. We're so desperate to tell this great news. Well, you can, but just tell the shepherds. Just tell this lowly group, this most despised group, tell them and they'll tell the world.

And it was just a beautiful picture of the imaginary joy of heaven, and Revelation speaks about that as well, the great joy of heaven and the anticipation of this remarkable event that God, as the angels who worshiped and adored Him, was sending Jesus to become a child in the womb and to be the Redeemer who came into our experience, born into darkness, born into the time of King Herod.

The angels' joy and anticipation must have been tempered by that fact. Can Jesus be born as a baby into this world, into this time, into this darkness?

[22 : 31] That's why He came, wasn't it? He came into the darkness, into the chaos of spiritual battle, into the chaos of sin and brokenness and separation.

Revelation is a book that I, there's tons of it, I don't understand in any way. There's lots of apocalyptic symbolism going on, but there is an amazing picture in Revelation 12 verse 4 which speaks about the evil one, and he says, His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth, and the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth so that when she bore her child, he might devour it.

She gave birth to a male child. And it goes on to speak about the fact that that was circumvented, that he wasn't able to destroy the child, this amazing symbolism and picture of the reality of warfare, spiritual warfare in Christ alone.

Hebrews 12 speaks about our sure and, Hebrews 11 verse 1, our sure and certain hope, and goes on to speak about that that's what our faith is based on, a sure and certain hope of Jesus Christ. And that is what we rejoice, and that's why we sing, and that's why we praise, and that's why we give our lives to Jesus Christ today because of His person, because of His passion, and because of His promises.

[23 : 55] So we give thanks today, and rejoice because of the person of Jesus Christ who was born here, born in complete juxtaposition to Herod, both kings, but in complete juxtaposition, an absolutely different kind of king.

No power for us corrupts, and absolute power corrupts, absolutely. And we recognize that, we recognize it in our current political environment on the world stage.

You get two very powerful people, Trump and Putin, and it is remarkable to see the power that they have and both the corruption that will be revealed as a result of that.

But here is a different kind of king, and this is the king of kings. This is the king. All other kings and power is destructive ultimately and failed.

He is the king who had sympathy and empathy, who had refugee status, who was born in poverty and scandal to an unwed mother, who knew loss and anonymity, whose life was marked, his public life was marked by a time for the marginalized, whose teaching was unparalleled, who brought warnings, who hated pride and particularly religious hypocrisy and lust, and spoke about the battles in our hearts, the unseen battles, who personified divine love and divine kindness, who took risks, great risks for people's sakes, whose piercing look got straight into our hearts.

[25 : 41] So the look of Jesus, the word of Jesus, the truth of Jesus exposes our heart, who wept at the graveside of a friend who had glory and power but emptied himself of that and was nailed to a cross.

His person and of course his passion taken from the Latin, I'm speaking about passion or emotion but rather suffering, passion meaning suffering.

He knows, he understands, he sees. He appreciates our suffering because he has gone through that and far more than we will ever experience because as God, he took our guilt and our sin and our loss and was estranged from his father on the cross in order to be our Savior.

The greatest act of evil that was ever perpetrated was against Jesus Christ, the innocent Son of God on the cross. And yet God took that greatest act of evil, even greater than Herod's act and he used it to reveal the greatest good, the deepest good that affects every single one of us today.

Every one of us, we're all mortal, we're all failed, we all fall short of God's glory and yet He powerfully gives free salvation because He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords is nothing like Him.

[27 : 09] In His passion and in His promises, what's the greatest promise of the Nativity? We're going to sing about it in a minute. Emmanuel, I am with you, God with us.

You know, that's what He says, isn't it? That's the fatherhood of God. That's the family, the great family motto that He brings, that He says, I'm with you.

When we come to Him by faith, when we come and offer ourselves and say, I have nothing to give you, I simply cling to your salvation and to your cross, I can't make myself right.

I trust and use my Savior. He says, you're my children. My beloved children, my heart yearns for you. I will have mercy on you. You are my darling child.

That's what He says to us all. He's this loving Father who is involved in this amazing rescue from the estrangement that causes us to be separated from Him and from one another.

[28 : 16] If you don't believe you're separated from God, if you're not a Christian today, you might not, but you know in your life and in your heart, you are separated. Sometimes from one another. You know that there's jealousies and bitternesses and grief and anger and just stuff in your heart.

That is the work of the evil one and the result of sin. But He says, I, you are my darling children when we come by faith.

In the reality of suffering and we don't belittle or make it less in any way, but it is not without purpose and it is not random.

It is temporary and He will use it to mature us towards Christ who suffered alone in order to be with us in our suffering and to redeem it and to bring it to an end.

As we look forward to the renewal of God in our lives with the sting of death being removed from us and ultimately His promise for us.

[29 : 27] What's His ultimate promise? If you were going to finish this sermon and there was a promise you would give that's related to the sermon, what would it be?

I will wipe away every tear. That's the only promise, isn't it? That you can finish this sermon with. Be Jesus, the great Son of God.

As Christians we know that He is there. He will be there to wipe away every tear. That is the kind of King He is.

What King cares about my tears? What King cares about the suffering of the ordinary person in the street, Jesus Christ? Of all people, we have most reason to rejoice today because we have an incredible future.

And it's so different from our human outlook in many ways. And I hope as we go into 2019 you will live considering that.

[30 : 27] And if you're not a believer, what is it that you're looking towards and looking for in 2019? What hope is it that you're clinging to as you look at your own heart?

Maybe you're not sure about God, but you stare down the barrel of your own mortality. May it be that you consider Jesus Christ because He is the returning King that we will all face.

And what is it that you will say to Him when He asks, why did you not put all your hope and trust in me? My arms were open.

I wanted you to be my child. I had done everything for you. I simply asked you to trust my darling child.

Amen. Let's pray briefly together. Father God, we ask and pray that you would bless your word to us, that you would help us to be not mournful without hope or unrealistically depressing, but to be realistic in the knowledge that as we recognize our need, we are provided with the answer in Jesus and the wholeness and the transformation and the hope and the beauty of all that Jesus provides for us, that nothing else can provide, no one and nothing can give us that reunion with you for whom we have been created, for whom we will find our creativity and our uniqueness and our joy and our peace and our forgiveness and our fullness.

[32 : 17] We will only find it as we come back to you. We rejoice in that marvelous message and we ask for your Holy Spirit to bless your word to us this morning as we return thanks with praise and adoration.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.