

Crucifixion

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[0 : 00] This is an account of a death. It's a unique account of a death, isn't it?

Because we've all experienced sad deaths, we've been speaking about them today. A tragic death in India that we have contact and connection with. And also one in Inverness, two people that many of us knew and loved.

And all of us have experienced death to a greater or lesser degree. What makes this account different? What makes the crucifixion a different death from every other death?

Well, it is a different death. It's a unique death. It's an unparalleled death. Why is that? Why?

Because it is full of life. The death of Jesus is actually full of life.

And what gives me any confidence in preaching about the death of Jesus that it will make any difference to anybody here? As we read this passage of Scripture, well, because it's God's word.

[1 : 05] And God has seen fit through at the core of His gospel, give us the crucifixion and give us the account of the crucifixion. And I believe the Holy Spirit will take it and use that death story today to change our lives, to transform us.

And I hope it's your prayer, as it is my prayer as we gather in worship. We're not just going over an account and saying, oh, isn't that sad? Oh, it's a shame that Jesus died. Isn't that a tragedy?

We're not going over a dramatic account of something that happened a long time ago. This is an event that changes the course of the universe, and God uses that to transform our lives.

I've got four themes briefly today from this unfathomably deep passage that could have 4,000 and 4 million, and in these current credits, days, 4 trillion applications for our lives, never-ending applications.

We're dealing with figures that are beyond our understanding these days, aren't we? But here's just four, very simple. And the four themes, the first is guilt.

[2 : 22] Four themes that come out very strongly in this passage particularly that we've read today. And one of them is guilt. Now, we bury guilt. We don't like to think about guilt. We don't talk about guilt. We ignore guilt as much as we can.

We psychoanalyze guilt. We blame religion for guilt. And yet atheists and Christians together all experience guilt.

Whether we're religious or not, we all know what it's like to be guilty. It's common to all of us. We've all hurt people. We've all felt bad about what we've said or what we've done.

We all have a sense in which our conscience are bruised and broken. We all bear secrets that we wouldn't share with anyone else because we are guilty about them.

We're all fearing judgement to a greater or lesser degree. The guy in America whose name I couldn't find out this week for whatever reason, I wasn't typing the right things in Google.

[3 : 23] But the guy who was caught recently for that massive fraud at the American Bank system, one of the things that I remember him saying that it was a billion, it wasn't a trillion, but hundreds of thousands of millions of pounds, and he was an older guy who'd been in the system for a long time.

You all know who it is. One of the things he said, when he was caught, he said, I've been waiting for this day. I've been expecting this day. All through these years he was expecting the day when he would be found out who's living with a great weight of guilt for fraudulently dealing with other people's money and living the rich, luxurious life on the back of that.

Waiting to be found out. And this passage is full of guilt. Full of guilt. The underlying truth of the passage is about accountability and about judgement with the associated emotions of sorrow and fear.

Jesus predicts future judgement for Jerusalem when he talks about the women who are childless, being more fortunate on that day, the fall of Jerusalem 70 AD.

Calvary itself is the judgement hill for criminals of the day. For those who are guilty, the confession of one of the thief I deserve to die.

[4 : 47] The sense of his fear of God, the reaction of the crowd when they have seen all the events where they move away with sorrow and contrition, beating their breasts because there's a sense of guilt, a palpable sense of guilt in this passage.

Have you sensed that? We can't just deny it, we can't just close it down, we can't pretend it's not there. It's a very real part. But there's one great exception to the guilt.

One great exception. The Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 31, the 41, the thief says, this man has done nothing wrong.

This man has done nothing wrong. I'm not sure exactly what the criminal understood by that claim, because we'll have said that in cases, wouldn't we? We'll have said to people, he's done nothing wrong, he's innocent here.

Maybe that's what he meant. I suspect he knew more than that, certainly by his plea. But he has the weight of Scripture behind him, doesn't he? This man, Jesus, has done nothing wrong.

[5 : 58] He is entirely innocent. There is no sin. There's no discomfort of guilt on Jesus on the cross. He is the perfect Son of God.

There is no secrets that he's holding, nothing that he's ashamed of. There is not one iota or ounce of guilt that is weighed on Jesus' shoulders.

This is the innocent one on the cross, entirely having done nothing wrong. And that's something to consider.

And what is important to consider, or at least one thing is important to consider, is the terrible reality that humanity at this point, crucified perfection.

And we can all be guilty in that, as members of the human race. Humanity at that point chose to crucify perfection.

[6 : 57] This man has done nothing wrong. By nature, human beings don't like God, and don't like perfection. And don't like the claims of Jesus' perfection.

And we want Him dead. We want Him out of the picture. We want Him out of our lives, because He induces within us a sense of unworthiness and guilt.

That's what drove these people to put Jesus to the cross. Every time we ignore Jesus and reject Him in our lives, and choose the lie of Satan, it's because our sinful natures crucify perfection, and don't like Jesus.

Every time we sideline Him, every time we reject His claims, every time we don't make Him our Lord, we are showing ourselves to be sinners.

And that condemns us, unless we come to Him for salvation. It's a very powerful picture of sinful human nature choosing to crucify perfection.

[8 : 04] And that leaves, if you've never done anything wrong in your life outwardly, or inwardly, if you've been perfect up to this day, and the fact that Christ isn't your Saviour, is enough to condemn for eternity, because sin crucifies perfection.

So there's guilt very strongly here. But there's also self-preservation very strongly in this passage.

And self-preservation is instinctive to us, as people, and it's not necessarily a bad thing at all.

Of course it's twisted and tainted a little bit by our sinful nature. But this desire to survive, survival, is very, very important to us all as human beings.

Of course it can become destructive if it's at the expense of other people's lives, which often it has been in the past. But we want to preserve ourselves, and we use all kinds of ways of preserving us, as people sometimes even use religion, to think, well that's a way of preserving myself, I do my best, if I go to church God will be pleased with that, and then He'll think about maybe accepting me in heaven at that day, and it can be about self-preservation.

But we know self-preservation can also be ugly in this world. Self-preservation of one tribal group, at the expense of the extermination of another one.

[9 : 35] You know, it can become wrong and sinful. But the great exception here is Christ. Again in terms of self-preservation, it wasn't His motive for being at the cross.

He didn't need to save Himself. He didn't need to save Himself. He wasn't in any danger. He was there utterly and completely, voluntarily.

There was nothing from which He needed to be redeemed. He didn't need to be saved in any sense whatsoever. And His motive for coming to earth wasn't self-preservation, it wasn't to save Himself.

This is the innocent God who was perfect and who had no needs to save Himself. He was there by choice, utterly, voluntarily.

And you know there's the famous Him that speaks about the nails not being able to hold Jesus Christ on the cross, but it was His love. That is entirely true and absolutely right. He could have hung on the cross on fresh air.

[10 : 45] No nails kept Him there ultimately. He was there utterly and completely because of His love for humanity and His love for those who would put their trust in Him and would take Him as their Savior.

He wasn't there with a selfish self-preservation. He was there as a servant. He was there as a redeemer. He was there as your Savior and His mind.

And His darkness that He experienced on the cross was a voluntary experience that He took on board for us.

If you go, don't have time to talk about the darkness today, but if you'd out inside at night in the dark, your eyes shouldn't get accustomed to it and it doesn't seem that dark anymore.

But if you come from a really bright room and go out into the dark, the contrast is just unbelievable and you can't see anything and it's a deep, deep darkness.

[11 : 49] I know for us the darkness isn't a great deal, even the darkness of the cross, the darkness of judgment, the darkness of sin, because well, we're surrounded by that and we're life spiritually, the darkness. But for Christ to face the darkness of the cross, coming from His perfect perfection and from the light of heaven, was just infinitely dark in a way that we can never understand.

But that darkness, that the light of the world experienced on our behalf, the wrath of God and the punishment for our sins, was to offer us, can I use the same terminology, preservation, life, unparalleled.

See, because we were born, every time we're born, we're born, not every time we're born, so I don't believe in reincarnation. So I just mean every time people are born, generally, throughout the world. Every time someone is born, there's life, you know, isn't there?

There's real life there and life is in our genes, in our very fabric. And it's sin that's brought in death. Have you ever watched someone dying?

And you'll see that. You'll see that every atom of their being, strains for life. And death is an alien reality.

[13 : 12] And it's brought death and hell to us. And yet Christ has come to offer us life. And we have the cameo of the criminal, don't we, in verses 41 and 42, that Luke only mentions, Dr. Luke only mentions this cameo with the criminal, who changes his mind.

We are getting punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. It's a great cameo of someone who's come to recognise what Jesus has to offer.

Or at least he's come to recognise his need for Jesus. You know, Jesus, remember me, please, when you come into your kingdom. A sense which he recognises the Lordship and the kingship of Jesus in whatever way he understood that.

And we have Christ's amazing answer. Today you will be with me in paradise. Just another name for heaven. Nothing else, not a different place.

Just another name for heaven. Today you'll be with me in paradise. The grief, the criminal, the thief on the cross, the grief on the cross. The grief, the criminal, the thief on the cross is the one who simply asks to be remembered.

[14 : 41] And Jesus says, you will be with me in paradise. Now it brings to mind Ephesians 3:21 to him, it's a great benediction, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

That is what Jesus offers to our grubby attempts at self-preservation. He offers abundantly, above and beyond what we can ask and think when we come to him by faith.

In paradise. Life with him. Life unparalleled where we face death. And when we scrabble about in our lives to preserve ourselves in our own way, that is come to the one who alone didn't live with that motive of self-preservation, but lived to be a sacrifice so that we could live.

So self-preservation, then the third and gloriously is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a great theme of this passage that we've read together today. Now even at the human level, forgiveness is a great

thing.

Even without God in the picture, it brings hope to us. When we've done something wrong and someone forgives us, maybe unconditionally, brings hope, it's redemptive, even at a human level, can we say, it's redemptive.

[16:13] What a difference it would be if there was forgiveness between Arab and Jew in the Middle East, for example. It's a great hope for us, it's a great inspiration that that might happen in some way in personal relationships where couples have almost gone down the road of divorce and separation, then there's reconciliation for whatever reason, forgiveness.

We have a sense of redeeming, buying back something that's broken, that's great. And even at a human level, its absence is so harsh, isn't it?

You know people who are unforgiving, they're not miserable beasts. It's not horrible to bear grudges. It's not horrible to carry the weight of everyone else's failure on your shoulders. It's unforgiving and to be harsh, judgmental, self-righteous, self-centered, condemnatory. They're ugly words, aren't they? They're sharp words. They're unpleasant words we recoil from them. But there's a far greater need for forgiveness, not merely on the human level, but the forgiveness that is absolutely at the foundation of all other forgiveness is, surely is a relationship with God.

[17:29] And this passage, Jesus, at the point almost of his most intimate sufferings, is able to say, Father, forgive them.

They don't know what they're doing. Not as some kind of martyr, but as the Son of God with the authority to say these things.

Were they forgiven by their repentance at Pentecost? Of course. Many of them were. The criminals implied, the one criminal is implied, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Implied request for forgiveness and for being remembered. And it's of course that very heart of Calvary. It's the very heart of our faith, is forgiveness.

That Jesus has come to take the price for our sins so that we can be forgiven and can offer forgiveness in this life to others as well.

[18:36] Jesus knew that. Luke knew that. We're back in one of our early studies. What number would it have been? It would be number seven or eight. Luke chapter five. The question is asked by Jesus, who can forgive sins but God alone?

He had that in his mind. He knew that's why he was coming. The forgiveness was at the very core of his work. He was coming to put things right between ourselves and God.

So that we go to Paul again in Ephesians and say, in him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of our sins. It's an old message, but it doesn't really come out of date at any point. Everything has changed before God for us. We're all going to face death. And death is more than just a natural consequence of living.

As we know from God's Word, the separation of body and soul is God's judgment against sin. And the answer to that is that Christ takes separation of body and soul on the cross.

[19:38] In our place, in His innocence, having done nothing wrong. So that we can be righteousness of God through and in Him. So that on the day of judgment, so that today, our only hope is in Jesus Christ.

Our only hope is forgiveness. Not self-preservation. Not wallowing in guilt. Not going our own way. But accepting what has been done fully and completely by the Son of God on our behalf. And you'd think, we sit here today and don't we? That's simple, isn't it?

Why would anyone not believe? But this passage is frightening. Because so many people in the passage don't accept forgiveness.

They can smell the events. They're right there. But Scripture records for us that at the cross itself, and maybe you're not a Christian here today thinking, oh, but if I was at the cross, I would believe.

[20:46] But here are people at the cross, they're soldiers, and all they can think of is dividing his garment between them. There's the rulers of the day who have no time but for mockery.

There's the classically the other criminal who doesn't turn to Jesus Christ, who don't believe. Isn't that astonishing?

That that's the case in this passage, that God records for us that people don't believe, that don't accept forgiveness, that don't look to Jesus Christ, and still want to scabble away in self-preserving means of salvation.

And so the reality surely is, for us, if you don't believe today, and you can be as near Jesus Christ as sitting beside Christians and being worshiping in a Christian church, these people were near to Jesus, but they didn't believe.

And it's a record on a scriptural record for us. It's a warning. If you don't believe today, then this warning should drive you to prayer that you're being blinded by Satan, that you remain in the dark, and that you're rejecting this sovereign, full, complete offer of forgiveness that is unparalleled and unmatched in any way, shape or form.

[22 : 10] Please be warned by the Scripture and seek Jesus Christ if you are not already a Christian.

And as Christians, let us live in that grace of forgiveness, let us live with that attitude in our own lives. Let's not be bitter and harboring hurt and pain and judgment on other people.

And lastly and very briefly, we've looked at guilt and self-preservation and forgiveness. But this passage also speaks about the unknown, strange in this age of science.

Who is it? This age of science. It's a scientific age. Everything's A, B and C, one, two, three.

Everything's clear cut, and science has got the answers for everything, so we're led to believe.

And anything that's unscientific is mocked and derided as being outmoded and unfashionable and strange. Yet interestingly, in the same age of science in which we live, there's never been more interest in extra-terrestrial kind of stuff than the occult and spiritualism and the unseen.

[23 : 31] Unparalleled interest in all these things, despite our scientific claims. The press are daft, you know. I read something in the press this week, a headline which said, amazingly, did Darwin kill God? It's an amazing statement.

And they call Christians naive. And there we have the press. He is the darling of the press, Darwin. My goodness, I hope, when everyone of us gets the 200th year anniversary we're as popular as Darwin is.

You see, the blue-eyed boy of all science and all answers seems to be. Poor Darwin himself would never have made these claims. But did Darwin kill God?

Brilliantly deluded thinking. This passage speaks clearly of the unseen that so many people are interested in their lives but are looking in the wrong place.

It's an insight into that unseen spiritual world where God reigns and where Christ has come from.

Don't have time to look into it. Just leave it to speak for itself.

[24 : 42] God was moulding every single part of this event. His unseen hand. Simon of Cyrene, a passer-by who is made to carry the cross.

In all probability, and look in Mark's Gospel, his son's names are mentioned. Simon of Cyrene's Rufus and Alexander's father. Mark primarily wrote his Gospel for the church in Rome.

Very, very, very probably that Rufus and Alexander were in the church in Rome. They were Christians. Their mother was a Christian and we presume that Simon became a Christian.

Maybe simply through the events of being hauled in to carry the cross. The unspoken word, no word from God but yet the unspoken word of darkness, unnatural darkness, and the curtain being ripped from top to bottom.

The earthquakes and the people rising from the dead. The words of Christ Himself, Today, that you'll be with me where in the tomb, in the grave, six feet under no today, you'll be with me in paradise.

[25 : 51] Another place, an unseen place, another kingdom. The praise that comes from one of the soldiers, God's working in his heart.

Jesus' own prophecy prediction, as we mentioned at the beginning of the fall of Jerusalem, that we have in verse 29 and 30, recognising that he was in sovereign control of events that are still to come.

No ordinary event, crucifixion. Just because you've known it from your mother's knee, many of you, may it not be something that's ordinary or plain, or doesn't speak to us in power for our own lives.

It's no ordinary death. It's inextricably linked to you and to me and to our future. Please consider the Saviour Jesus Christ, and maybe praise Him for who He is.

It's bow our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father, we ask and pray that you would forgive us if we have missed out so much about your truth in this crucifixion, as we have only a short time together.

[27 : 06] We ask that your spirit would take what we have looked at and considered, and maybe even what we haven't looked at and considered, but is in your word, and we will tie it to our hearts

with power, with renewed power today.

If we are bound and if we are enslaved by guilt, may we find freedom and release and forgiveness in Jesus. If our lives are self-centred and self-preserving, without any thought of God as Saviour and Lord and Redeemer, may we move from that unsteady and uncertain ground, onto the solid rock who is Jesus Christ.

And Lord, help us to be aware of that unknown world, which science can neither prove nor disprove, but which is clearly known and understood and is real.

We ask and pray that we would put our faith in the one who came from that unseen world, Jesus Christ Himself, and who returned to paradise, and is the right hand of God today interceding on their behalf.

So Lord God, make these unseen realities very real for us, and may we not live simply in that physical, seen world, but may we by faith live with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, each and every one of us.

[28 : 30] So bless us and help us. We sing our Psalm, parting Psalm of praise, may we do so heart and soul, body and mind, voice and volume for Jesus' sake. Amen.