

He Died

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[0 : 0 0] So we're in the midst of doing a small series on the passion of Christ up to next week Easter Sunday and the passion of the cross, the passion of Christ, the word passion is taken from the Latin term passion which doesn't mean romance or feeling it means suffering and so we're looking at the sufferings of Christ this morning and last year on this very same week we looked at the crucifixion and we looked at it in a really raw and rugged way we looked particularly at the body of Christ broken the physicality the brutality but Matthew's account is very different than John's in some ways there are no heartstrings being pulled in Matthew's account Matthew's account is strictly factual if you noticed it just lays out the details of what happened the wine giving Simon of Cyrene, Elijah, the darkness, the resurrection bodies, the temple curtains he actually doesn't focus on Jesus hardly at all in this account it's about the details mostly surrounding the cross of Christ but the center of the passage is the only moment that he he hones down in on Jesus himself and it's when Christ calls out my God my God why have you forsaken me and so we'll look at the passage just like that first we'll look at what Matthew's trying to tell us about the details and the details and that's this that the cross is foolishness and then secondly we'll hone down in on the center of the passage on

Jesus words about being forsaken and I think Matthew there is trying to show us that the cross is also the power of God so the cross is foolishness and the cross is the power of God so first the cross is foolishness of course this phrase the cross is foolishness or nonsense it comes from 1 Corinthians 1 and it comes from Paul and Paul says that the word of the cross is nonsense to those who are perishing but for those who are being saved it's the power of God what does he mean well he doesn't just say that the cross is nonsense to those who are perishing he literally says the word of the cross and in Greek that little word is the word logos the logos of the cross and there's two senses to what he probably means one is that literally the message of the cross is nonsense to those who are perishing in other words the words themselves the gospel preaching the gospel it's nonsense sounds silly to nonsensical to those who are perishing but there's a further meaning and that's it's not just the words of the gospel or nonsense but he's specifically referring to the logos of the cross being nonsense and we know from John chapter 1 that the logos of the cross the logos is Jesus Christ it's the person of Christ that's who the logos is it's the communication the word of God and so what Paul's getting out here is that it's not just the gospel that's that's silly or folly to those who are perishing but it's the man it's Jesus Christ himself on the cross he is the foolishness he is the silly one he's the nonsensical one to those who are perishing and that's exactly what Matthew is getting at in the details in this passage if you if you look to the passage carefully you'll notice that what's central to all the details in the passage is the mockery it was the mock it's the mocking that's so central and it occurs at four different levels in this passage the first way it occurs even a verse before we started reading this morning is that the Roman soldiers are the first to mock him in verse 31 it says after they mocked him they put on a purple robe they put a crown of thorns on his head but it goes on they then made in verse 32 Simon of siren carry his crossbeam now this is actually a way of mocking Jesus because every single person who's crucified by the Roman crucifixion is forced to carry their own crossbeam that's just normal standard operating procedure but this man can't do it and that's what they're saying somebody else will carry it for you why because they're suggesting that he's weak they're suggesting he's weak but it goes on verse 35 they ripped his garments off of them and then they cast lots for them and every single painting maybe that you've seen of Jesus on the cross from the Middle Ages or the Renaissance or whatever is false in the sense that most of the time they put a loin cloth on Christ on the cross but there was no loin cloth Jesus Christ is absolutely naked on the cross he's not wearing anything it was typical and the procedure that women would be crucified facing the cross as an act of modesty okay after they've beaten them and hung them on a cross they would at least give them the decency to face the cross but men know men were faced outward men were completely naked facing outward and that's Jesus is naked here this is part of his humiliation part of the scorn the mockery verse 37 they put up the sign he's the king of the Jews and of course this is sarcasm right this is not being serious they're joking in this moment but it's not just the soldiers who are mocking him the second level of mockery comes from the civilians the bystander so in verse 39 the people that are passing by typically what they would do is they would hang crosses they would crucify people along the road right so it's people walking down a road both

Gentiles and Jews because this is the week of the Passover and their hurling insults at him but the word is actually more specific than the translators offer here in our English text the word the little word is called is hey blaspheme moon right and you can hear it blaspheme moon blaspheme they're not just mocking him they're uttering blasphemies at him why are they doing that because they're thinking about his own claims being the king of the Jews the son of God God incarnate and their blast they're reversing the claims and they're uttering blasphemies at him and saying look at you now basically is the idea that's that is getting across further after Jesus cries out to God they think that he's possibly caught out to Elijah and what's going on there is that in Aramaic the little word the little phrase my God my God sounds like the same word for the proper name Elijah so all that's happening there is they've misheard him as they're walking by and when that happens basically in verse 49 a bunch of the people say okay let's sit back and see what happens this guy he's called out to Elijah he thinks Elijah is gonna come say save him and the idea is sit back and pass the popcorn they're treating it like this is an entertainment like this is spectacle right like this is going to the movies it's a particular form of mockery it's not just the Roman soldiers it's not just the Gentile and Jewish civilians civilians are bystanders but thirdly it's the chief priests and the authorities of course in verse 41 they join in save yourself you fool save yourself are you the king come down from the cross if you're the king and then the fourth and final level of mockery the criminals in verse 44 it says that the ones that were being crucified next to him they join in as well and begin to mock him you see the point is that at every single level of society is being represented here in this picture and they're all doing the same thing they're sarcastically mocking him they're making fun of them in other words the suggestion Matthew is giving is the same thing that that Paul's talking about in 1 Corinthians 1 and that's that to so many the cross is nonsense the Lagos the man he's a fool he's he's a

God who is weak he's not the king he can't save himself he can't carry his own cross beam he's naked and he's ashamed and that's the picture that Matthew's painting for us meet your king right that's what he's getting across that's what the people think and John Stodd in his excellent book *The Cross of Christ* he asked this question following following Matthew he says what kind of a religion would have a God who dies in weakness at the hands of his own creatures no matter whether the background was Roman or Jewish or both the early enemies of Christianity he says lost no opportunity to ridicule the claim that God's anointed one the Savior ended his life on the cross this idea was crazy in the Roman world this is well illustrated by a graffito from the second century which has been discovered on a hill in Rome and it's on the wall of a house and most scholars considered this to be the first painting of Jesus being crucified after his death in the early centuries it's the first surviving picture of the crucifixion and what is it it's a caricature it's a crude drawing that depicts a man stretched out on a cross with the head of a donkey see and look that Paul what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 1 and what Matthew is painting a picture for us here doesn't stop in the early years it's consistent throughout all of history that the cross is foolishness it's both the response of religious and non-religious people throughout all of history for instance Islam rejects the idea of Jesus on the cross because it says that it's inappropriate no prophet of God could be crucified and killed in such a weak way and so what the typical idea in traditional Islam is that

Jesus actually never did die on the cross someone took his place before he was hung most of the time they say Simon of Cyrene he actually was the one that was crucified so Jesus was never actually killed so but it's not just Islam Gandhi the beloved Gandhi in 1894 he said this I might accept Jesus as a martyr as an embodiment of sacrifice as a divine teacher but not as the most perfect man ever born who died on a cross for the death of sin his death on the cross might be a great example to the world but that there is anything like a miraculous virtue in it I will not accept that okay but it's not just religious responses in modern history it's also it's also non-religious responses probably the most important atheist that's ever lived is a god by the name of Friedrich Nietzsche who is a German philosopher who lived up to the early 20th century and he wrote a very famous book called the Antichrist and this is how he describes the cross in the book he says that human happiness is the feeling that power is increasing right and so that means that the most harmful thing for human happiness is an active sympathy for the ill constituted and the weak and this means for Nietzsche that Christianity above all above all religions above all ideas above all philosophies has taken the side of everything that's weak in the world everything that's base everything that's ill constituted it is the religion of pity he says it preserves what is right for destruction and it thwarts the laws of evolution and he says that the center of it all is a contemptuous God on a cross weakness incarnate okay so this is the religious and they're non-religious but you can see that in every part of history both ancient and modern the cross is foolishness right so today we hear the cross is unjust it's cosmic child abuse it's barbarism it's ultimate weakness it's a weak religion with a weak God at the center of it it's foolishness Paul nailed it in 1st Corinthians 18 118 that's exactly what people many so many have thought about it throughout all of the centuries and this is how Stott summarizes that whole picture up he says he's reflecting on the fact that the Christians adopted the cross as a symbol of their identity in the early centuries of the church and he says the

[12 : 04] Christians choice of a cross as the symbol of their faith is more surprising when we remember the horror with which crucifixion was regarded in the ancient world we can understand why Paul's message of the cross was to many of his listeners utter foolishness and madness how could any sane person worship as a God a dead man who's been justly condemned as a criminal and subjected to the most humiliating form of execution this combination of death crime and shame puts him beyond the pale of respect let alone the pale of worship and so stott asked why would people cling to the cross so that's point one the foolishness of the cross why would people cling to the cross the foolishness the Logos of God and point to the power because the cross Paul tells us is the power of God so the cross is foolishness to some but to those experiencing salvation the cross is the power of God why did so many cling to it in the midst of this this very same picture that so many have called the cross foolishness throughout all the centuries the cross changed the world the cross revolutionized life around the Mediterranean the cross started a revolution the cross has turned the world upside down it's changed the entirety of our culture all because of what happened here at Golgotha in the first century and why is it where is the power what is it about this that is the power of God that Paul saying in the midst of a world that sees something so foolish and so weak hanging there on the cross what is it well first what we know what this means is that the cross just like Jesus life is incredibly divisive right it's incredibly divisive people come before the cross and they either bow in its shadow or they trip over it and stumble it's always been incredibly divisive the Romans the Jews the Gentiles the criminals the authorities the bystanders Gandhi Muhammad and Friedrich Nietzsche all could not handle it all could not they stumbled over the cross right and you know what that means that means at some level in first encounter the cross is foolishness to every single human being to all of us because because just like they did in the first century humans measure success we measure achievement we measure the idea of what it means to be powerful according to the cultural standards of our time right the Jews expected the Messiah the Son of God the

King of the Jews to come in to march straight to Rome to start a political revolution and to take over to restore the kingdom of God that's what they expected right and it's the same exact expectation of the Son of God that Friedrich Nietzsche has of a modern man he expects power he expects competition he expects revenge right he expects somebody to come in and take what's theirs right it's the basic notion of power that you see in a toddler it's easy it's simple it's the notion that I'm gonna get what's mine it's the notion that's at the heart of every single human being it's human nature this is our idea of power right and so it's not surprising that at some level every single human being in all of history has come up against the claims of the cross come up against the man of power and said that's not power that's weakness that's foolishness right because that's human nature that's human nature but the cross the cross subverts all ideas previous ideas in history of what it means to be powerful of what it means to be strong of what it might mean to be the Messiah and what it says to us is that power the power of the gospel the power of God is actually victory by losing victory by losing oh my what kind of power is this where is this power so the two things briefly about this power what is this power it's first the power of choice and it's secondly the power of forgiveness so first the power of choice now if you paid careful attention to the to the text and particularly to the mockings and the text maybe you started to catch on that Matthew just like Mark in his writing of the passion is intending this to be seen as ironic right it's ironic it's it's not just supposed to come across at face value but it's ironic look have you read the rest of the story I bet you have have you read the chapters that come after this one just think about the mockery the mockery is this from from the Roman soldiers Jesus you said you're gonna tear down the temple and in three days you're gonna build it back up again look at you now right but did Nietzsche read the rest of the story did you read the rest of the story look what happens in three days the power the man of God the power of God on the cross what does he do he resurrects from the dead okay of course right what does this mean this means that the mockery is ironic because the cross the man on the cross the law goes on the cross he's there because he wants to be you see this is voluntary he the idea here that

Matthew's painting is he's not being crucified he's chosen to do this it's not simply passive he's commanding it and he made that very clear it wasn't a secret that's that's why they're able to mock him like this because the fact that he had determined this to be the case was not a secret right just listen to these verses and mark 9 the son of man he had already predicted will be betrayed into the hands of men and they will kill him and in three days he will rise again because Jesus said that just the chapter before this as he's eating a Passover meal with them he says he said to the disciples Jesus said do you not know that the son of man is about to be handed over to crucifixion to death and the disciples respond by saying no no not you not the son of man you can't go you can't die right and this is what he said do you remember what he said said to them do you not know that if I wanted I could call upon my father and he would send 12,000 angels to my aid in a moment right look if you're willing to read the text what you see here is this isn't this is an utter weakness this is the man of power that's put himself on the cross this is voluntary this is voluntary condescension it's ironic the mockery is ironic and you don't even have to go to the end of the Gospel of Matthew to see that you don't even have to go to the end all the way to the resurrection because it appears in our own text you see in verse in verse 54 the centurion the head of the soldiers there's an instance where Matthew's offering us something of a tragic humor episode because what happens when Jesus commits himself to the Father when he gives up his spirit all of a sudden there's an earthquake rocks split open darkness descends over the land people that had once been dead are now walking around in the city and the curtains temple is torn into and the centurion is reflecting on all this in this moment and he says this must have actually been the son of God you see it's ironic it's a trap it's tragic humor look they crucify a lot of people in the ancient eras in the first century and nothing like this picture ever happens nobody else that they had ever crucified had ever at the moment of his death split rocks open caused an earthquake caused resurrected bodies to appear in the city of Jerusalem but it never happened before right this is not this is not the normal death of a man being crucified and that's because this is voluntary condescension God become man in other words Jesus let death swallow him so that he could destroy death from the inside out that's the purpose that's the point right so that's the first thing the second thing and the final thing is the power of forgiveness and most important the power of forgiveness at the very center of this passage is the cry Jesus cry in Aramaic my God my God why have you forsaken me and the the common the translators won't quite go far enough with what's happening here because it's not a cry the word that's used there for the Jesus's voice the sound of his voice is that's the only time that word ever appears in the entirety of the Bible and it's much more in English the best thing we can do with it is just to say miserable scream it's loud it's torturous it's despondent okay it's not just a cry it's a scream it's torturous and one of the things to notice that is that look if you're trying to perpetuate belief in

Jesus Christ a man who is crucified on a cross as the Messiah as the Son of God in the first century what you don't do is you don't include this episode you don't include the part where Jesus all of a sudden cries out in despondent misery and Aramaic why have I been forsaken right that it doesn't it doesn't look like power it looks like weakness right and why is it there because it happened the only way we can account for this being in the text is that it happened and that they're trying to give a true account of precisely what took place it happened now this this is not what when people in the past have thought a lot about this people like Nietzsche and others and they've looked at this the forsaken son Jesus Christ being forsaken at the cross and said basically you see this is foolishness his own father gave him up this is this is this is proof this is what it looks like for Christianity to be broken to not work right but first this is not a plan going wrong okay because what's happening here actually is that this is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy okay when Jesus cries out and says my God my God why have you forsaken me he's quoting he's quoting from Psalm chapter 22 and this is in Psalm chapter 22 is a psalm with David and just like all the Psalms of David when David writes a psalm when he writes a prayer he's typically talking about something that's happening in his own life something's bad has happened to him and he's praying he's grieving over it and but this song this song Psalm 22 is unusual and Old

Testament scholars will talk about this a lot they'll say look for all the other Psalms of David we can figure out exactly what it was that David was so upset about that was causing him to write these prayers and these Psalms but not Psalm 22 because in Psalm 22 he says things like this my God my God why has thou forsaken me my garments have been stripped from me my bones have been broken my heart is melted you laid me in dust you've laid me down in the ashes of death this never happened to David he there was no experience in David that makes sense of this right it's prophetic it's Christological you see what it means is that when Jesus cries out on the cross my God my God why have you forsaken me that this is the fulfillment of the gospel that was preached beforehand this is the God who has the power over history you see this has been prophesied of old but even more than that secondly what does this mean what does it mean what does it mean for Jesus to cry out for father to have forsaken the son what does that mean this is impossible to penetrate into to suppose that we can get out what it means for the son to be forsaken by the father it's a cliff that we cannot jump over but the image that we're given in the passage is that as soon as this happens darkness descends upon the land and again what's happening that this is a fulfillment of the Old Testament you see anytime in the Old Testament that God showed his wrath on numerous occasions he would blot out the son he would cover the son in hell is often described or Hades in Old Testament as the place of outer darkness and you see what we're being given in this passage is a physical manifestation of what it might have been like for the son to be forsaken it's utter darkness what it's saying to us in this moment when things become dark as it's saying that this is the son entering into the hell of hells and this makes sense and here's why when Jesus says the words my God my God this is the language of the covenant my God you see God had come to Abraham in the

[25 : 24] Old Testament and he has said I will choose you and you will be my people I will make out of you a great nation and I will say to you you will be my people you will call me my God right the people are to say my God and I will say back to you God says my people this is the language of the covenant and when God made the covenant he said to the people of Israel and to the people that it actually applies to everyone who's ever been created as children of God do this obey me love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength live under my commandments keep the Torah do what I've commanded you and love me and you will live and you will be blessed right and what happened you know if you've read many of the stories in the Old Testament you know that time after time time after time the people cry out my God my God but it's not because they deserve it every single time they fall every single time they break their promise every single time they break the covenant and you see what's happening here Jesus Christ is the only man under heaven who ever entered into this world and obeyed perfectly he's the only man who ever came into this world and did exactly what he was supposed to do who obeyed the law who loved the Lord his

God with all his heart soul mind and strength he's the only one who's ever done it and that means that he's the only man in history who ever had the right to actually say my God my God he's the only one who ever actually could say you truly are my father my God and had the right to do so based on his own perfection but the only one who ever had the right to do it at the time that he does it instead of hearing you are my son all he gets is the deafening silence of the divine wrath you see why because he stood in our place what's happening here is the power forgiveness the God man standing in our place look this is this is so anti-modern and so not popular and so controversial for me to say in the 21st century world but what the cross is demanding and why it's so hard to look at the cross is anything else but foolishness is because what the cross is demanding of every single human being in the entirety of the world when they face up to it when they come up to get sit is to is for them to recognize that they are guilty that they stand before God as a sinner deserving of the wrath of God and that's what makes it so difficult to say power of God instead of foolishness right it's so much easier to say foolishness because foolishness doesn't require you to determine yourself to be guilty but that's exactly what the cross is the cross is the pronouncement to every single human being that you are guilty and at the same time that you were loved incomprehensibly but in order to get the second half the love incomprehensible you have to face up to who you are you fat have to face up to your guilt I was listening to a pastor recently talk about a story of a man who had committed adultery and he had cheated on his wife and he came to a kind of a typical modern therapist and he was talking to the therapist and they knew each other well and he said you know I've cheated on my wife it's happened more than once and the problem is most of all I don't feel guilty and she's she said well what's so wrong what's the problem this is beautiful this is a gift this is freedom if you don't feel guilty that means you're not constrained by the relationship it means you don't have to be burdened it means you can let go it means you can move on if you don't feel if you don't have a feeling of guilt and what's to hold you back right you can do what you want right and this is what the guy said to her he said I get what you're saying but actually I thought that that's what it would be for me but actually it makes me despair that I don't feel guilty and he said the sense of guilt is all that I had left to tell me that there was something above me that actually mattered that there that there was a good that existed above me something transcendent that could actually call me out of my weakness right you see the sense of guilt for us moderns for us 21st century people is one of the last things we have left in our culture that actually affirms for us that there is a transcendent God you see as much as we hate to feel guilty guilt points you to the fact that there is truly a good outside of you a transcendent a standard a perfection something that is making demands of you from the outside and at the same time what guilt says to us is that there may actually be hope that somewhere somehow somebody is perfect maybe there's hope that we can get out of this mess right that's what the sense and the feeling of guilt says to us Christianity's answer is that that answer is the logos of the cross which is foolishness and power the man the man of power on the right he's that he is the answer to this great problem it's called the great exchange see us Lewis calls it that he who knew no sin became

sin for us you see so that and here's the second half of the exchange while we were still sinners we became righteousness in God it's the great exchange he for me I for him he bore my sin so that I get his righteousness look we'll just close with this we're out of time it's so important to know and to remember here the difficult truth that Jesus is not wearing anything on the cross that he's naked and that he's ashamed why this is an image in a picture of what it means for him to be forsaken because what he's doing here is he's putting on exactly what Adam bore in his sin you see the picture of what it means to be a sinner in the very first moment of the curse is what it's to be naked it's to be naked and ashamed it's to realize that this is not right something is wrong with me and that Jesus Christ is the second Adam he's the last Adam he bore everything that Adam merited in his sin so that we could have his righteousness only the God man could possess a power like this the power forgiveness Nietzsche was so wrong you see so wrong why did he do it why did he do it it's not enough to simply say and we're actually closing with this it's not enough to simply say he did it for the forgiveness of sins it's not that's actually not enough that's the legal aspect of the cross and that's so beautiful and so true his guilt our guilt born in him we get his righteous that's the legal aspect but there's more why did he do it you get this the slightest image of why when the temple curtain is torn into you see the temple meant that God's presence on this earth is restricted it's isolated not because he doesn't have the power to be everywhere he does but because of sin because of curse he only comes down and meets humanity in one place that's the covenant what's happening here is that when the temple is torn into at the cross of Christ it's an announcement that God came to make his presence universal with human beings all of humanity all over the place all the time you see the point he didn't just come to be the legal representative for your sins yes he did that he came for you not just for your sin but for you as a person he came to get you you see and so every time you come up against the cross what you have to say what you have to tell yourself is you have to use two little words you have to say for me what is this what is the verb aratio the flagellation the beating with a whip with shards of bone and metal what is the naked crucifixion with splinters upon his back what is the suffocation that he underwent it's physical brutality it's for me but even more he went into the hell of hell is the abyss of the abyss forsaken by the father total exile why the answer for me you have to say to yourself for me and so this week this week in our tradition we and I promise this is literally the closing this week in our tradition we say in our tradition every single Sunday's Easter

Jesus Christ is alive he died once for sins and at the same time the world and the church in the world in our culture sees a specific date for Easter every every year that that that the world recognizes it's a celebration of spring of winter turn to spring of resurrection and that's okay and we and at the same time we profess every every Sunday's Easter right but this week does offer you an opportunity to reflect it is a sacred week by so many across the world and even when children who don't who think that this is foolishness or don't know about it at all you know they pick up that Easter egg they draw some bunny on a sheet of paper somewhere at some park or something maybe just for a moment just like at Christmas time they'll put down the reflection on the egg and they'll think what is this image of the stone rolled away of the cross what is this mean and they'll ask their parents and the answer is that Jesus Christ is for us he's for the world he came for sinners so I invite you to reflect this week on the cross for me for us let's pray father we thank you for the crucifixion for the death of the Son of God because in him we have been made righteous if we would only see our guilt and believe Lord we ask that whether we've listened to the gospel once or a million times that you would awaken us to the fact of the power of God it's unbelievable there's nothing like it it's never been replicated no one has ever come close to being the power of forgiveness that Jesus Christ is for us and so we ask Lord that you would help us to own it I pray this in Jesus name amen