

Good Friday

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 April 2015

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] And turn a few books to John chapter 19. And turn a few books to John chapter 19.

We remember today that the cross was the absolute priority of the Lord Jesus. That is where we've met. That it was the absolute priority of Jesus. It was a priority to get to it and go through it. And we remember that the cross was the message of the early church. It literally turned the world upside down. It went everywhere. And wherever the message of the cross went, people would hear and come to life.

And one day the believers will end up in heaven, won't we? And we will discover that freshly and more keenly that we are going to sing about the Savior. And it will never ever get dull.

Heaven will never ever be boring. And in heaven we will sing the praise of the Lamb once slain. We will sing of the cross for eternity. And it will never get dull.

[1 : 54] And so there's nothing more important that we can give our mind to this morning. This section has Jesus hanging on the cross. And he's saying two words.

One word in the original. Literally, I thirst. It's one word in the original. And the other word is one word. It is finished. I thirst and it is finished.

They're both single words. And so Jesus speaks two words. I thirst and it is finished. And then he dies. And then two men come and bury him.

I want to focus on two things. One I'm calling the end of fear. And the other one I'm calling the beginning of faith. The end of fear and the beginning of faith.

Paragraph one leads to paragraph two. Look at me with the end of verse 28. The end of fear. After Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture.

[2 : 56] He's second away from dying. He has just followed the plan of God perfectly through his life. And there is one more part of God's script which has to fall into place.

It is a verse from the Old Testament. It's from Psalm 69. Where a man is surrounded by his enemies. And he says this. They give me vinegar. I thirst. And yet they've not done that.

And here is Jesus at the cross. And he says, because he is thirsty, I thirst. And they give him the vinegar. A small incident. A small detail of this incident.

Is that he's really thirsty. It's the middle of the day. It is hot. He's been worked hard. He's been beaten hard. He's not pretending to be thirsty.

He's experiencing, isn't he, a very terrible thirst. He's experiencing the thirst of judgment. Do you remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus?

[3 : 57] The rich man did not listen to the gospel, did he? And he ended up in hell. And it's told that he says to Abraham, can you send Lazarus to come and dip a bit of water on my tongue?

Because I'm experiencing a great thirst. And I hope there's a hint of that here. That Jesus is experiencing the judgment of God.

But Jesus is genuinely thirsty. And he knows that there is a promise to be fulfilled. So he says, I thirst. And they bring the sponge with vinegar. And that sounds terrible to us, doesn't it?

Because our knowledge of vinegar is that it tastes disgusting. We lived in a house full of lads. One of them was, when I was a student, he was ever so slightly overweight and started to run.

He was a very, very unhealthy chap. And after running, he had a bottle of Coke that he should have. And so we wanted to wind up Ewan Reese. And so took out about a quarter of the Coke and filled it with vinegar.

[4 : 59] And so Ewan Reese comes in, very, very sweaty, gasping for a drink. Opens up the can of Coke. And gulps it down.

The bottle of Coke. And then we hear, Didn't talk to us for the week. Vinegar is horrible to say you don't drink vinegar. Why would you drink vinegar? What it means is you mustn't think of vinegar or

balsamic vinegar.

You must think of cheap wine. It's the sort of wine that the soldiers would have had on hand for their enjoyment. And therefore, they are expressing here a little kindness to him by giving him something to drink.

Now, if you know the story of the cross at all, you'll know that Jesus has refused a sensitive drink. We're told that in Matthew and Mark. That was the sort of drink that would dull the pain. The kind of anesthetic he refused.

But he accepts this cheap wine. And he takes it and he drinks it. That is the small detail. But there's a big detail going on here, isn't there? There is a big plan taking place.

[6 : 00] Where the script of God is being fulfilled perfectly. And we are not in the dark about the script of God. The script of God is the Bible you've got on your laps. That all the promises of God and all the plans of God and all the purposes of God are going to take place.

So although Jesus is treated on the cross as if he is like any other criminal, they think he was kind of number 173647. And although he looks like a little dot on the great Roman Empire, he is actually the king of that empire.

He's not just the king of the Jews, as Pilate said on that sign. He is the king of the world. He is the saviour of the world. And all the plans of God and all the plans of the universe and all the plans of eternity are bound up with this dying man on the cross.

And so do you notice that these plans fall into place? God does not have any trouble getting his plans to fall into place. God is not blocked.

God is not stuck. God is not stalled. And when Jesus says, knowing that there is a scripture to be fulfilled, I thirst, along comes the wine vinegar. Now our plans are much smaller plans, aren't they?

[7 : 20] They last for a little while. And very often they fail. But the plans of God are perfect, unstoppable, and wonderful. And if you miss the fact that Jesus is the key to the plans of God, then you have to live in this world as if you've been forced through a door onto a stage in front of an audience and you've got no script, you've got no plot, and you've got to live as though you've lost the plot.

You've never been given the plot. You've never read the plot. But when you take up the plan of God, the word of God, the scriptures of God, you discover that there is a great and eternal plan that all focuses on this man, Jesus, dying on the cross.

And when you come to him, and when you take him seriously, you are caught up in that plan of God for good.

I read this week, you might know, in 1925 there was a sect called the Order of the Star of the East. And they built a 2,000 seat assembly just outside, well, just in Sydney, Australia.

And they were waiting for Jesus to come back. They predicted that he would come through Sydney Harbour, of all the places in the world to come. In 1925, that's when Jesus would arrive.

[8 : 45] The Bible says you should never make predictions about the coming of Jesus. And of course, the Order of the Star of the East was shown to be completely wrong. Four years later, in 1929, the Order of the Star of the East was disbanded.

They sold the amphitheatre, it is demolished, and I'm now told that there are two blocks of high-rise flats there. That is the predictions of man, isn't it? That is the planning of man.

You just don't get that with God. Everything falls into place, everything. Now the second thing that Jesus says in the text, verse 30, is it is finished. It's one word in the original, it is tatallestoi.

Tatalestoi. So what does Jesus mean by that? He's not saying, is he, as he hangs on the cross, well, this is it, the cause is finished.

That would be ridiculous. He knows that there is a plan of God that is being worked out for good. He's not saying, my life is finished. He is talking about something which is huge, to do with the whole purposes and plans of God.

[9 : 54] Now what he calls out in a loud voice on the cross is this, my task is accomplished. The mission is done. The project that has been given to me by my Father is fulfilled.

I've done it. It's an absolutely wonderful cry from the cross that we could spend hours thinking about. The implications of this. But when you do understand that Jesus' cry, it is finished, was a cry of success.

It is a cry of victory. It is a cry of triumph. Then it's much, much harder, isn't it, to have low views of Jesus. It's much harder to have low views of him.

You realise, don't you, that Jesus has accomplished everything. But though he looks like a dead man on a cross, he is actually succeeding. It's what he came to do. It's why J.C. Ryle said this, we rest our souls on a finished work. And it's also much harder to have anxious or proud thoughts about yourself, isn't it?

[11:05] When you know that Jesus cried out, it is finished. You do not have to walk around today thinking, have I been good enough? I'm not good. He finished the work.

You don't have to go around today thinking, have I earned enough brownie points? Have I swung the scales so I will get in? You don't have to think like that. Because Jesus cried, it is finished. He did the work of salvation. The work of salvation is a gift and not a trophy. Do you get that? The work of Christ is a gift and not a trophy.

And that is why Jesus says it is done. Religion says to you today, go and do stuff. Go to the Hatch. Go to Mecca. Go to confession. Do this and do that. And you will never ever know whether you've done enough. So keep on doing it.

[12:10] Pride says, I can do it. Anxiety says, I hope I'm doing it. Jesus says, I have done it. I have done it.

And it is a gift that you can receive today. And you can rejoice in that. And that is why artists can never capture the cross.

It doesn't matter how clever they are. Photographers can never do some portrayal of the cross. Filmmakers can never get that across. About the cross.

You've got to listen. You've got to listen. To what Jesus is saying. To realise that when he calls out, it is finished.

What is he saying? He is saying, it is mission accomplished. So having done the work of paying for sin. We read in verse 30. He bowed his head and he gave up his spirit.

[13:10] He bowed his head. And he gave up his spirit. Nobody took it. He gave it up. Well, what are we going to do with the corpse?

And if you've done, if you know anything about the history of this period, you'll know that the Romans had no sensitivities about burial at all. That the Romans would happily leave a corpse on the cross or in the street to be pecked to pieces by the birds.

If a man or woman were crucified, well, you can just let them know the birds will feast on them. If they were to Roman, who cares? Leave them to rot. The Jews would bury their people.

They would put them in a mass grave. And because this is Passover week, and because it's a particular Sabbath, do you see it in verse 31? It's a special Sabbath. It's a high Sabbath. They don't want corpses hanging down on the Sabbath day.

Because that kind of desecrates the Sabbath. They decided they would speed up the process of dying, and they would ask the Romans to do the breaking of the legs. So that the whole kind of breath, asphyxiation, would be sped up, and they would die more quickly.

[14:22] But do you notice the ugliness of this religion? Isn't it so ugly, religion? So these are the Jews, that they don't mind killing the Messiah, but they don't want to walk into Pilate's house.

Here are the Jews, that don't mind killing the Son of God, but they just don't want to have a body hanging there on the Sabbath day. There's an ugly side of religion.

There's an ugly side of religion, where you don't get focused on, and fixating on things that matter. You get focused on the things that don't matter. And you miss the things that do. So they go to the Roman soldiers, and the Roman soldiers oblige.

But they don't break the legs of Jesus. Why? Because he's dead. We've already been told, haven't we, he gave up his spirit, and he died, because he's dead.

And John is deliberate, probably the most deliberate of all the Gospel writers, to say to you, he's dead. So first of all, John tells us, he gave up his spirit. Verse 30.

[15:27] Then second, the soldiers do not need to break his leg. And the Roman soldiers, I would want to argue with you, know much better than you or I, whether a body is dead or alive.

Little do they realise, that God had actually predicted, that they would not break his legs. Not a bone will be broken. So these Roman soldiers, who've got no real interest in Jesus, and no great belief in Jesus, are doing exactly what God expects them to do.

Again, Bishop Royal says, the wickedest enemies of God, are only axes, saws, and hammers in his hand. The third reason we know Jesus is dead, is in verse 34.

It's that one of the soldiers, jabbed Jesus with a spear. And we read that there is a flow of blood and water. Some medical people think that that's the serum, and clotted blood of the heart, that's been speared.

It's romantically written about, isn't it, in Rock of Ages. You know that hymn, let the water and the blood, be of sin the double and cure. But whether there's meant to be something, very powerful and meaningful, in this blood and water, I don't know.

[16:38] But I do know, that it's a perfectly clear sign, that the body is dead. And so even the soldiers, with their rough spear, are fitting into the plans of eternal God.

And the fourth reason we know, that Jesus is definitely dead, is because two friends come along, in the next paragraph, and take him down from the cross. And they see that he is dead. And they wrap him from head to toe, in bandages for burial.

My suspicion is, you don't normally do that on a living person. They stick him in a grave. And so I am saying, that this is the end of fear.

Not because Christians stop being afraid, we continue to have certain fears, don't we? But I am saying, that it is the end of fear, because it really is, the end of danger, for the believer. And the more that you begin to receive, and grasp, and acknowledge, and understand, or get convicted, by the work of Jesus, and the plan, that the plan of God has been done, the more that you will be set free.

The more that you will be secure. The more that you will be sure. The more that you will be hopeful. And the less that you will be fearful. Because it is finished.

[17:52] And you should find yourself on Good Friday, rejoicing that Jesus died on the cross for sinners. And you will find yourself saying, that is me.

And I am so grateful. And I don't want to pay for myself for my sins. And the fact that somebody has paid the debt for me, and that debt is paid and it is finished, well it is unbelievably good.

And I'm going to take up his offer this morning. And I'm going to take up his invitation. And I'm going to take up this salvation, as a free gift for God. And I'm going to put myself lock, stock and barrel in his hands.

And I will be glad. Well the second thing is the beginning of faith, verses 38 to 42. The end of fear, the beginning of faith. And you've got these two Jewish men coming.

They put their faith in Christ. Joseph of Arimathea is only mentioned in this incident. He's also mentioned in Matthew, Mark and Luke and John.

[18:56] This is all we have about him. He's a member of the Jewish council. He is a very serious, senior Jewish figure. He's part of the establishment.

And we know, don't we, that the whole council has opposed Jesus. And now Joseph of Arimathea stands against the council.

And the reason he's done that is in verse 38. After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple, he was a follower of the Lord Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews.

He's been a secret disciple up till now. But he's not going to be a secret disciple anymore. He's been a secret disciple up till now, but he's not going to be a secret disciple anymore.

He's going to stand publicly with a dead Messiah. And he's going to bury him with honour. And I suspect Pilate agreed to give him the body, partly because he was an important man.

[20:05] And a wealthy man. And partly because Pilate felt guilty because he had handed over Jesus and he wanted something to be done properly. And so you see what Joseph and Nicodemus do. Nicodemus is the man who came to Jesus in John chapter 3.

And Jesus said to Nicodemus, listen you religious hypocrite, you need new birth. You need new life. You need eternal life. And these two men, who have been very senior Jewish leaders, turn their back on their Jewish compatriots.

And they align themselves with Jesus. And they wrap his body with great care. They place it in a new nearby tomb. Now why would Joseph do that? Jesus is dead.

Why commit career suicide? Why get offside with the Jewish council at the very point when this Christian hero has gone?

When it looks like a lost cause, doesn't it, at this point? He is dead. It's a lost cause. But it isn't a lost cause, is it?

[21:16] It is the exact opposite of a lost cause. This is the cause of God. And this is the cause of eternal life. This is the cause of being reconciled to God.

This is the cause of having an eternal future. And when Joseph and Nicodemus stand boldly in support of Jesus, you can imagine, can't you, that is the end of their welcome in the Jewish council. But they have worked out, aren't they? They have worked out that they are going to gain infinitely more by standing with a dead Messiah than by staying in secret in the Jewish council.

They are privately convinced that Jesus is the King and the Saviour of the world and so they are publicly ready to stand for him. And they are doing what I fear some of us might be doing. Which is well, what some of us might not be doing. They have given up on the secret Christian life. They've given up on the secret Christian life.

[22 : 25] I secretly believe but actually I'm not doing anything. I secretly believe but I'm not committing to anything.

I secretly believe but I'm not making any sacrifices. I secretly believe but I'm not prepared to turn my back on these certain sins.

I secretly believe but I'm never going to tell anyone in school. I secretly believe but I never want my work colleagues to find out. And these two men say no, that is over.

All the secrecy is over. Trying to live a double life is over. Sitting on the fence is over. We're coming out publicly for Jesus of Nazareth.

It's the most wonderful thing. You'll know, don't you? That we are in a kind of massive secularisation process. What's the one of the politicians said last night or one of the spin doctors said, isn't it?

[23 : 29] The NHS is the closest thing we have to a national religion. It's quite funny. We do have a national religion. But the NHS is the closest thing we have to a national religion.

And this secularisation process has a huge impact on our country, isn't it? So our friends and our neighbours, our work colleagues, they centre their lives around themselves. Around self and pleasure and money and success.

And so the cross and the message of Jesus has been driven out of our country in the public sphere. And there's a great deal of darkness.

But actually what we see here is this massive wedge that there is between private faith and public declaration, which is very appropriate for us today.

It's as if, isn't it, in our culture, people say, listen, you can have your private faith. That's alright. You believe what you want to believe. Alright? But it must not emerge into the public sphere.

[24 : 36] Yeah, yeah, yeah, you can have faith in Jesus, that's fine. But just don't allow him in the public sphere. Don't let the claims of Christ over morality, over judgement to come.

Don't you dare bring them into public. You can believe that in private. Just don't dare say it. And secularisation and ideology is so dangerous.

Because we believe in a Christian gospel, we believe in a God who integrates the world. We believe in a God who explains the world and everything in it.

And we believe that eternity is so big. But you see, here is a man in John's gospel, Nicodemus, who has decided that that wedge, that great divide between private faith and public declaration is over.

It is over. It brings the two together. And so Nicodemus and Joseph Marimathea, they stand publicly for Christ. I hope you learn from these two men.

[25 : 47] They have a private faith which has a public expression. And that is called biblical Christianity. And when you realise that Jesus is King and Saviour, you cannot go and hide in a little box called church or home.

I want to finish by asking one question. Why does the death of Jesus lead to the birth of this faith in these two men?

what is it that causes this tragedy which is really a triumph to turn into utter transformation? The tragedy of the cross which is a triumph which transforms these two men.

How is that? What is it that causes the change and can cause the change in your life? Jesus is dead, dead, dead, but now there are two men who are living, living, living.

What did it? And part of the answer is this. John 19 is at the end of John's Gospel. And Joseph and Nicodemus have listened obviously to Jesus.

[27 : 01] When Jesus said in John chapter 6 whoever comes to me I will never drive away. Or when he said in John 8 the truth will set you free. Or when he said in John 10 the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Or in John 11 when he said I am the resurrection and the life whoever believes in me will live. Or John 12 the man who loves his life will lose it. Whoever serves me must follow me.

They listened to those things and they put their trust in him. And even the death of the Lord Jesus didn't fool them. Because they knew that the cross of Jesus Christ was the culmination of the purposes and the plans of God to save sinners.

And there is no more secrecy. There is no more serving two masters. You cannot serve two masters Jesus says to them and to you. You can talk about a master but who do you serve?

And Jesus and Nicodemus have done their listening and made their decision and they've come out publicly. And there's still one real reason why these two men have come to faith and come to life and this is the climax it is Jesus who saves them by dying.

[28 : 22] The power of the cross is what saves these men. What Jesus did when he died for their sins and gave up his life to provide for these men a new life.

So the link between Jesus dying and Joseph living is that Jesus is dying causes people to live. It's the pain that sets people free.

It's the death which breathes new life into Joseph and wherever the message of the cross is being proclaimed this Good Friday around the world people hear the simple message of the cross which is so simple and when they get it new life begins.

eternal life begins. So Jesus said in John 12 if I am lifted up I will draw people to myself and Jesus was lifted up and these two men were drawn to him.

Through the preaching of the cross Jesus Christ is lifted up and he draws people and it may be that for you today you realise this is the time that my secret Christianity has got to be over.

[29 : 45] It's got to be over. And I want to be a clear and faithful and courageous follower. You cannot play the double game anymore.

And it may be that this morning for the first time you realise that he has finished the work of salvation. I thought it was up to me but it is not because he cries it is finished.

And all of that is part of the sovereign plans of the living God. the end of fear and the beginning of faith.

Let's pray.