

Good Friday Service

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[0 : 00] Well, please do sit down. Before we start properly, I do want to thank Paul for his welcome. Thank you all for your welcome. And thank you for your prayers for us over the last few months.

We really appreciate it. I know some kind offers of help as well. So thank you. Thank you very much. It's nice to be back. It's nice to stand up here in the new building for the first time.

It's even greater. Better bring God's word to you. Let's pray together again. Almighty God, our Father, it is wonderful to sing these truths about the power of the cross.

Christ became sin for us. Heavenly Father, we pray that you'd send your spirit now. For flesh cannot discern the things of the spirit.

Help me to handle these unfathomable truths. With reverence and awe. And by the power of your spirit, help us to grasp afresh something of the magnitude of your love for us in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 16] And the hideous nature of our sin and what it deserves. For we ask it in the precious, powerful name of Jesus, your only Son.

Amen. Amen. Many of you will know, and my wife can confirm this, and my children, I am not the most observant person in the world.

If there is a bird in the garden, I will be the last to see it. And when it comes to things that I kind of see every day, I'm completely useless. Does he wear glasses?

I have no idea. What color is the wallpaper? What color is our bedroom painted? I don't know. Is it Magnolia? Probably. That's what I wanted everything to be, because that makes my life simple.

I just don't recognize things that are in front of me. And the danger, as we look at the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus, is this is a story we know so well.

[2 : 20] We're familiar with it. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, or around church for any length of time, you'll be aware of the doctrine of the atonement and what it meant.

And yet, it can be like wallpaper. Paul, in writing to the Galatians, one of the earliest letters in the New Testament, he says to them at the start of the chapter 3, you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you'd be turning to another gospel which is no gospel?

It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. And so this morning, I hope that by God's grace, Jesus Christ will be publicly portrayed as crucified.

That he might grip our attention. And that we might not turn to the various false gospels, the self-help, the freedom by following your desires, and all the other nonsense that is around us in the world, and yet can seem so attractive, and come back again to Christ and not be bewitched.

Well, I am a child of the 1970s, I'm pleased to admit to. And that meant when I was learning to cross the road, I was helped by the Green Cross code man, who very simply said, stop, look, listen.

[3 : 50] And having done that, decide to respond safely in whether you cross the road or not. So this morning, very simply, I want us to stop, to look, to listen, and then to respond to what we have seen and heard.

So first of all, let's look, especially in verses 32 to 39, as Matthew trains his camera on this scene, and highlights particular things he wants us to see.

And what do we see as we look at this man stumbling out of Jerusalem, with a cross beam of a cross on his back? It's a scene of complete horror and humiliation, isn't it?

When we sit and look at it. Complete horror and humiliation. For a start, the very location of it. He is outside the city, verse 32, as they went out.

So they go out of the city. This crucifixion is so horrible. It has to take place out of the city. It's beyond the pale. You can't be part of society and be crucified.

[5 : 06] In fact, the Romans would often have crucifixions in a very public place, where people coming into a city could see it. So they would learn the lesson from it. And so here it is.

This man, Jesus, is facing the most horrendous death of all. Crucifixion, Cicero wrote, should be farthest from the mind of the Roman citizen.

It is the lowest of the low. No Roman citizen could be crucified except with the express order of Caesar. It was left for the slaves and the lowest in society. Deliberately public example.

It's horrific. But also look at the horror and the humiliation of this sight. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene named Simon by name.

They compelled him to carry his cross. Why? Because Jesus was so weak. He'd been, after all, he'd been up all night. Been marched backwards and forwards through the city for his trial.

[6 : 12] In the previous scene, we didn't look at. He'd been flogged and mocked and beaten. As he comes out of the city now, there's blood from where the crown of thorns had been on his head.

There's blood dripping from his back, from his scourging. It's a horrible sight. And he is weak. He's not like the James Bond action figure who can come out of the destroyed building and yet still be all guns blazing and kill the enemy.

He has no strength left to carry his own cross. It's pitiful. It's humiliating. And look closely at who do we see with him?

No one. No one. It's a horror and humiliation of facing this dark hour on his own.

Paul read earlier on in our prayers from Psalm 88 that darkness was his closest friend. That was true for the Lord Jesus. The previous night, as he was arrested, all his disciples disappeared into the darkness.

[7 : 21] Ashamed and scared, they ran away. It's now humiliated, horrifically alone. He comes out of the city. As we go on, verse 34, they offered him wine to drink mixed with gall.

But when he tasted it, he would not drink it. It's like the sufferer in Psalm 69. The humiliation of getting something that should be comforting, but is not.

It's a cruel, mocking joke. It wasn't something to satisfy his thirst. As the psalmist says in Psalm 69, I looked for pity, but there was none. For comforters, but I found none.

They gave me poison for my food, and for my thirst, they gave me sour wine to drink. It's humiliating, isn't it? They mock him.

And there's the horror and humiliation of his powerlessness. Verse 39, when they crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Now, if we lived in the first century, we'd know fine well that to be crucified would mean to hang there naked, exposed, humiliated.

[8 : 37] And it's the powerlessness of it, isn't it? The soldier's just playing dice for his clothes as he hangs there, humiliated above them. And if you and I were good first century Jews, we'd see another level of humiliation here.

For the law of God stated very clearly, Deuteronomy 21, 23, that anyone who is hung on a cross is under the curse of God. And see, we see this man who'd ridden into town just a few days earlier, being acclaimed as a king, coming in the name of David and the coming kingdom.

Yet here he is, publicly, horrifically, humiliated, in front of our very eyes, under the curse of God. And if we're sensitive to what Matthew is showing us, we see it as the horror and humiliation of a king.

because that's the overall picture here. We would have seen it in the previous scene where the Roman soldiers mocked him, gave him a reed, gave him a crown of thorns, dressed him in a purple robe and mocked the idea of him being king.

We see it in the sign above his head, verse 37. This is Jesus, the king of the Jews, hanging between two robbers.

[10 : 08] We see it most of all in the expert way Matthew sets up his camera like a brilliant movie producer, showing us scenes which echo and show signs of, scenes from previous movies.

So Matthew highlights what looks like Psalm 22, which David starts by saying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The very worst, Jesus will cry out in a few hours, a few verses later. He deliberately points to the camera so he can see all that being echoed. And the question behind it is, who is God's king? Who is God's king? Which kingdom rules here? The kingdom of Pilate? The kingdom of the world? The kingdom of the religious leaders? Or the kingdom of this humiliated, horrific-looking man rejected by God?

And of course, the answer, if we know Psalm 22, is that what starts with suffering and humiliation and rejection ends in victory.

[11 : 19] Psalm 22, verse 28, for kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. This is the humiliation of God's king.

And we should ask, shouldn't we, why is this happening? We could give all sorts of answers. We could say it's because of the envy of the religious leaders. And certainly, that's something Pilate had noticed back in verse 18.

We could say it's because Pilate is a coward and despite declaring Jesus to be innocent, still gave in because he feared a riot.

And there might be some truth in that, verse 24. But Matthew, the gospel writer, wants us to see another truth, a deeper, more profound mystery.

This is happening because the night before, Jesus had knelt in Gethsemane. Chapter 26, verse 39, and prayed, my father, if it be possible, let this cup, this suffering, this horrific humiliation pass from me.

[12 : 31] Nevertheless, not as I will, but what you will. That cup, that horrific humiliation was God's right anger, right punishment, his settled personal hostility against all this evil in the world, against all our sin, all our self-centeredness, all the ways we swallow Satan's lie that says, God is not good.

God doesn't really love you. All our gossip, all our comparing ourselves to other people, all our self-satisfaction, all our little selfish moments and bitter thoughts and angry resentments, all our shame, all our secrets.

And Jesus, the Holy One, understood better than any of us ever could what it meant to take the Father's wrath against all that.

And yet still, that previous night, he renewed his commitment to come and suffer in the place of people like you and I. Of course, that commitment was older than just the previous evening.

It was a commitment he'd renewed every day of his life from the cradle in Bethlehem to a dying breath on Calvary as he committed himself to go the Father's way.

[14 : 17] It was a commitment that was born in his very name, the name the angels had given him before he was born as a child. For his name is Jesus, that he will save his people from their sins.

It was a commitment he renewed every day as he obeyed the law, not only in the obvious things, but never having a look of frustration, never a sigh of self-centeredness against God's will.

It was written in the scriptures he fulfilled. It was written before the dawn of time. Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 1, he was the lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

It was written together in the mystery of the eternal covenant that we read about in Ephesians 1 and in John 17, where the Father chose to redeem, the Son chose to come into the world and shed his blood to rescue us, and the Spirit chose to come and apply that to blind sinners like us.

This is happening because the man Christ Jesus chose for it to happen in fulfillment to God's eternal purposes. So as we look at the horror and humiliation of this man on the cross, what must we grasp here?

[15 : 42] But we need to grasp, don't we, that there was no other way, there was no other way that we could be forgiven.

There's no quick, easy route to say sorry. There's no get out of jail free card for God to just overlook our sin. It matters.

It matters. There's no cheap price. No cut price deal. And as we look at Jesus' humiliation before people, we need to grasp, don't we, that what he suffered publicly that we see is, it's only the tip of the iceberg.

You know what they say about icebergs, don't you? We only see sort of the 10% that is visible, the vast majority that is underneath. And so it is as we look at Jesus' suffering.

We only see the tip of the iceberg. We don't get to grasp the full wrath that he bore for us. We hear it a little bit in his cry later on. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[16 : 48] But we only get a glimpse of it. And moreover, the horror and humiliation he suffered before men that day is, my friends, what you and I deserve before God.

And yet he bore it for us. what we see here is how serious our sin is. But also, don't we see something else?

How incredible is God's love? How incredible is the love of Jesus that he should choose to do that for me or for you? How incredible is the love of the Father that he would give his only son that we could be his?

That Jesus should be despised and rejected so that we could be loved and accepted? That he should be humiliated and cast down so that we can be lifted up? That he should be bloodied and bruised so that we should be safe forever?

Can we get a glimpse of this love that he would willingly suffer for us? How can we ever doubt that God loves us?

[18:03] In those dark moments where you think God does not care, can you look back at Jesus on the cross and really ask that? As the hymn writer put it, upon the cross of Jesus mine eyes at times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me and from my smitten heart with tears two wonders I confess the wonders of his glorious love and my own worthlessness well that's what we see what do we hear?

Listen, stop, look, listen, what do we hear as we listen? Verses 39 to 44 well what the English translation can't really capture here is we what we hear is continual mocking and temptation from all around it's continual in the original language it's clear it's harder in the English verse 39 the passers-by kept on deriding him verses 41 to 43 the religious leaders keep on saying things that are mocking and tempting and accusing him verse 44 the two robbers kept on reviling him it was consistent it didn't stop it was from all around not just the robbers on either side but from the highest in society the leaders the passers-by just doing their thing and the lowest of the low they crucified with him albeit Luke tells us one changed their tune later let's listen to what the mocking consists of the passers-by verses 39 and 40 they were wagging their heads a sign of disdain and contempt and they distort

Jesus' words verse 40 you who destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days save yourselves see there's something about Jesus there's something about what he said but they get it wrong what Jesus has actually said John 2 verse 19 was you destroy this temple meaning his body and I will rebuild it in three days but they didn't really understand so instead they're mocking him saying you think you can destroy this beautiful temple Herod's built and then rebuild it in three days but it took him 40 years but here's the very first irony because the true temple the true meeting place of God with his people is not the real estate back in the city that's gone in 40 years that will be rubble the real meeting place is in the flesh of Jesus Christ his body is the new temple and they spoke too soon didn't they if only they'd waited till

Sunday afternoon they'd known he was alive the body had indeed been raised from the dead but it's not just the pastors by it's the religious elite as well and their continual mocking is laden with irony so verse 42 he saved others he cannot save himself but that's the whole point he's choosing to save others by not saving himself he resisted the temptation to show his power then so his power can be seen for all eternity and the people like you and me he's brought to himself then they mock the idea of his kingship and power he is the king of Israel the king of God's covenant people let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him if you're the king show us your power and yet it is because he is the king of God's people he stays up on the cross to win an eternal kingdom that you and I can be part of because he is

God's king he stays on the cross until he is defeated sin and death and Satan for kingship belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations Psalm 22 verse 28 again and then they mock the idea don't they in verse 43 that God desires him he trusts in God let God deliver him if he desires him for he said I am the son of God that's an echo of Satan's temptation back in chapter 4 verses 3 and 6 if you really are God's son then do a miracle show God loves you show God cares and if you're a Christian you will know that temptation won't you oh really you think God loves you and why did he let one of your loved ones die during this pandemic you think

[23:16] God loves you then why did that relationship not work out you think God loves you then why hasn't he answered that prayer you've been praying for years why are some of your children still walking away from the Lord you think God loves you then why is life so miserable and hard you think God loves you then why do you constantly deal with the anxiety and depression if God loves you why are you so lonely and if you know that temptation then do you see you see what Jesus is doing he is resisting it he is overcoming it he is continuing to trust his father and he's waiting for God the father to vindicate him and that gives us hope when Satan hurls those fiery arrows at us and insinuates that God doesn't care and we can see God's love as we look at Jesus well then there's the robbers next to him verse 44 they keep on mocking him and they simply have the same taunts as everyone else don't they just fall into line with what everyone else is saying and so it comes from all sides here is poor Jesus hanging on his own getting continually mocked and

tempted from all sides and listen carefully do you hear any encouraging words anyone on his side any cheerleaders no he's absolutely isolated all his disciples have gone and deserted him he dies alone to establish his kingdom and if we believe in

Jesus as king if we live for his kingdom not the kingdom of this world then we will face that mocking too won't we many of us have already experienced it you'll be laughed at for believing in God like believing in the tooth fairy you'll be mocked for believing in ancient fairy tales you'll be mocked for thinking that Jesus is the only way to God if you're at school perhaps you're or even if you're not at school you'll be mocked and face humiliation believing what Jesus teaches about ethics especially sexual ethics and relationships and identity and male and female how narrow minded how oppressive will face the temptation to cave in and yet what kingdom are we living for are we living for being accepted now or for the kingdom to come we need to remember

Jesus earlier promise blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you not are all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account Jesus was blessed as he hung there faithful to the father and what do we hear from Jesus as we listen we hear nothing not a murmur of complaint not a sigh of self pity not a quiet word of explanation he suffers in silence so look we see the horror and humiliation that our sin incurs listen we hear the continual mocking and temptation but finally let's respond where do we see ourselves in this picture Matthew paints it's easy to be like the passers by there were religious people going to

Jerusalem around Jerusalem for worship at Passover and it's easy in a sense even if we are Christians to pass by here once a year we get to Good Friday and we think about it there J.C. Ryle writing about 140 years ago said let us meditate frequently on these things let us often read over the story of Christ's passion let us not settle for second hand knowledge like those passers by if we don't understand what's going on then let's pray let's seek let's think let's ask for help let's not be overtaken by urgent matters of the day that outweigh the eternal matters of judgment before the throne of God let us not pass by the son of God on a cross let's just wallpaper our eyes let us ponder until we can save the apostle Paul the son of God loved me and gave himself for me maybe we're like religious leaders unfortunately like me you've grown up in a church you may think of them as pantomime villains we see them we want to boo and hiss because they're the bad guys right but actually they were the people who knew their Bibles they were the people who in one sense were zealous to do what

[28 : 33] God wanted but not according to knowledge they were people with a privileged position and yet you didn't really respond to it what happened why is it they were so arrogant to Jesus it's because God blinded them God gave them over to their pride to their self righteousness to their hard heartedness and if we're honest if we come from a religious background like I do it's easy to grow up knowing the answers it's easy to grow up looking good in the eyes of the world and thinking we're quite fine thank you I wouldn't it be an awful thing if God left us blind in our sin it's only by the mercy of God that we can see this so let's pray that the doctrine of the atonement will not merely be a fact that we assert but a heartwarming truth that informs our lives and the way we live day by day we might not stand at the foot of the cross and mock as they did but weep over our sin and weep over his love maybe we can be like the robbers you just join in without thinking let's not just join in with the taunts of the world maybe you've done that for some time not taking christianity and the cross seriously please don't fall into that trap please consider what god has done for you in christ but if you're a baptized christian here today i hope you can see yourself somewhere else in this story because the amazing truth is we are baptized into christ's death do you not know says the apostle paul all of you baptized into christ jesus were baptized into his death as you look at this scene where do you see yourself baptized christian you can see yourself in christ on the cross for he has taken your sin he has borne your punishment as he hangs there not only that he has taken our very sinful nature our old selves with all our distorted loves and twisted desires he has nailed it to the cross so it is dead and now we have a new life by faith in christ in him you are justified it's just as if you'd never sinned it's just as if you'd always obeyed it's just as if you'd lived jesus life your old sinful nature hangs there dead no longer with power over you you have a new nature to come it comes out the tomb on sunday you are dead to the world system you're dead to belonging to this age needing to prove yourself to needing to be popular to needing to be accepted because you are loved by the king of kings and you're a place in an eternal kingdom so why worry about riches or honor or success or reputation or promotion or whether you've got a house or not you have an

eternal dwelling place and as you hear jesus breathing his last victory cry that is your victory because jesus has won it for you and satan is defeated life is ours to live because he has died where do you see yourself as you look at this scene i hope we see ourselves united to jesus the one who has died for us and he will rise again because it's

friday but sunday is coming i hope you see yourself loved and cherished forever because that is what you are so how do we respond to what we see and hear well it's right to weep with sorrow for our sin by god's grace may we also weep for joy and for love that's been shown us and may we live on in confidence knowing our king will come back and that life is ours to live through him let's pray Amen.