

Jesus crucified

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Date: 11 October 2020

Preacher: John Woods

[0:00] Well, good evening everybody and welcome to this pre-recorded meeting or pre-recorded introduction! on the 11th of October in the evening. My name is Philip Wells. I'm just introducing this and very soon I'll hand over to our main speaker John Woods, friend and colleague of mine, ex-pastor of Lansing Tabernacle. I'm recording this earlier in the week. We've had a week of news and changes and a lot to think about and who knows what will have happened between now and Sunday, now when I'm recording and Sunday when you're watching this. Well, we don't know, but we can focus on the things that don't change and our passage and our thoughts this evening are directed to the crucifixion of the

Lord Jesus Christ. And let me just click and show you what's the plan. So very simply this evening we're focusing on the cross of Jesus Christ for our comfort and edification and for the glory of the Lord Jesus. The Apostle Paul says, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

So let's have those thoughts in our minds as we sing Beneath the Cross of Jesus. Beneath the Cross of Jesus I find a place to stand And wonder at such mercy That cools me as I am For hands that should discard me Hold wounds which tell me come Beneath the Cross of Jesus My unworthy soul is one Beneath the Cross of Jesus

His family is my own Once strangers chasing selfless dreams Now one through grace alone How could I now dishonor The ones that you have loved The ones that you have loved Beneath the Cross of Jesus See the children called by God Beneath the Cross of Jesus See the children called by God Beneath the Cross of Jesus The path before the Crown We follow in His footsteps Where promised hope is found How great the joy before us To be His perfect bride Beneath the Cross of Jesus We will gladly live our lives

And now we're going to pray together Almighty God our Rock and our Redeemer We come to you through Jesus' name We come to you through Jesus' name We come to you through Jesus' name And now we're going to pray together Almighty God our Rock and our Redeemer We come to you through Jesus Christ who loved us enough to die for us and in so doing to ensure an eternal salvation to be His perfect life And now we're going to pray together And now we're going to pray together Almighty God our Rock and our Redeemer And now we're going to pray together And now we're going to pray together Almighty God our Rock and our Redeemer We come to you through Jesus Christ who loved us enough to die for us and in so doing to ensure an eternal salvation for all His people We thank you that not only did He die on the cross but He rose again from the dead in vindication of what He did And in order to bring us into the future life of the resurrection

[5:01] We thank you that already we are risen with Him spiritually And we know that we will be risen with Him physically one day So we come this evening in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection And praying that you will draw near to us in your risen presence To minister to us all that we need as we come to the foot of your cross just now We confess our sins and our need of you And ask that you will be greatly exalted in every way Our crucified risen Saviour Amen We're going to sing this song Man of Sorrows What a name for the Son of God Who came ruined sinners to reclaim And after we've sung this John's going to read to us and he'll give us the talk Let us tell us the talk

Man of Sorrows Man of Sorrows Man of Sorrows Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came. Ruined sinners to reclaim, hallelujah, what a Savior.

Mocked by insults harsh and crude, in my place condemned he stood. Sealed my pardon with his blood, hallelujah, what a Savior.

Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was he.

Full atonement can it be, hallelujah, what a Savior.

[7:27] Lifted up was he to die, it is finished was his cry.

Now in heaven exalted high, hallelujah, what a Savior.

When he comes, a glorious King, all his ransomed home to bring.

Then anew this song we'll sing, hallelujah, what a Savior.

Thank you so much for your welcome.

[8:27] I'm John Woods. I was until the end of February the pastor of Lansing Tabernacle. I'm now the training director for the School of Preachers Trust. It's very good to join you for this series in Matthew.

I've done two sermons in this series, but they've come as audio recordings. First time I've given a video sermon to you. And today we're looking at Matthew chapter 27 and the passage verses 32 to 44 concerning the crucifixion of Jesus.

And we're going to begin by reading that passage. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

They came to a place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall, but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.

When they crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head, they placed the written charge against him.

[9:37] This is Jesus, the king of the Jews. Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself.

Come down from the cross if you are the son of God. In the same way, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself.

He's the king of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him. For he said, I'm the son of God.

In the same way, the rebels who were crucified with him also heeded insults on him. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word and pray now that you'll speak to us through this passage of scripture.

Open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to receive from you. Draw near to us, O God, that we might draw near to you and know the blessing of your presence and your salvation.

[10:48] For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. This story reminds me of the story of the man in the art gallery in the section where modern art was hanging.

He was before a particularly abstract piece of modern art and he was looking at it and giving his opinion. Load of rubbish.

Waste of space. My three-year-old could paint better than that. Unbeknown to him, the director of the gallery was standing behind him and said, the merits of these paintings is beyond question.

They are not on trial. We are. And that's exactly the situation here in Matthew 27. Jesus is not on trial.

We are. Here we have a picture of Jesus as he goes to the cross. And there are snapshots of those who are around the cross.

[11:49] The camera is located on the cross where Jesus is and it pans around those who surround him and gives us insights into their reaction to him, their responses and their words.

We don't hear Jesus speak. We hear some of his words repeated to him and use as insults, but he does not speak. We have many actions performed upon Jesus, but Jesus does not perform any actions here in this section.

We are on trial. Our responses, our reaction to the central figure who is invisible and silent. Our reactions are the key thing here.

We are on trial. How will we respond to Jesus today? In Lamentations we read, in Lamentations 2.15, All who pass your way clap their hands at you.

They scoff and shake their heads at daughter Jerusalem. Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth? Certainly, we see a reflection of the first half of that section in Lamentations here, as everybody seems to join in, adding their words of mockery for Jesus.

[13:15] But the latter half of the statement is interesting, that the beautiful daughter of Jerusalem, the city, the beautiful city where God dwells, is suddenly not looking the perfection of beauty, but a ruin, a deserted place.

And Jesus, the Lord of Jerusalem, is becoming like Jerusalem, an abandoned, deserted city. He is alone and he is besieged as he goes to the cross and experiences crucifixion.

He takes the place of his people. He takes the place of abandoned Jerusalem, being abandoned for them so that they might be offered the invitation, the welcome into the very heart and house of God.

The first reaction that we see here is the reaction of a man who is co-opted into service of Jesus.

Jesus buckles under the weight of his cross beam as he carries it to the place of the skull, the place of crucifixion. He has been beaten savagely.

[14:31] He has experienced great privation as he moves towards the cross. He's experienced the trauma of trials and therefore someone needs to help him.

His helpers, his disciples, have all abandoned him. And there needs to be someone else to step in to assist him. It's ironic that the man is called Simon, Simon of Cyrene.

Simon is co-opted to help Jesus. Of course, there was a Simon in the group of 12 disciples, Simon Peter. But Simon is not there.

He's not available to help. So another Simon takes his place. We're told in this gospel that disciples are those who take up their cross and follow Jesus.

Here, uniquely, Simon takes up the cross of Jesus and follows him. There are indications in Mark's gospel and Romans 16 that this man and his family were well known to the first century Christian church.

[15:43] And the assumption is that they became Christians because of this initial experience of Simon encountering Jesus on the road to the cross.

We don't know that for certain, although that seems like a fairly good option. The other group around Jesus that the camera trains upon are the soldiers who are part of the detail, who are involved in actually crucifying Jesus.

And there we see a measure of cynicism. The soldiers who are simply doing their job, like the German concentration camp guards, were simply obeying orders, were doing our job.

And the job that they had to do was to take the man to the place of crucifixion and to make sure that he was crucified and to stand guard.

And that's what was held here. They stood guard over the crucified Jesus. They also divide his clothes. Part of the perk of the job of being on crucifixion detail was that you got to have some of the belongings of the person who was crucified.

[17:01] After all, they didn't need them anymore. And they do divide his garments. They treat him as though he is just one more Jewish loser going to crucifixion.

It's interesting, isn't it, that crucifixion is a very common idea in the first century world. Hundreds of thousands of people would have been crucified.

And we're hard-pressed to think of many names of people who are crucified. We can think of Jesus. We can think of Spartacus. But beyond that, it's difficult.

And we remember crucifixion not because it was so widespread, but because of one particular individual who was crucified. It's interesting that in the original, the description of crucifixion just uses one word, that he was crucified.

He was taken and he was crucified. There's no description. There's no detail. The first century believers would have known all about crucifixions, horrors.

[18:11] But none of that is described. The cross speaks for itself. Jesus was crucified. We don't need to up the emotional intensity. We don't need to give the graphic or gory details.

He was crucified. He died there upon the cross. This form of Roman execution that was brutal and horrific.

He was crucified. And upon the cross, he was offered a narcotic, a drink to perhaps dull the pain. Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless. I look for sympathy, but there was none for comforts, but I found none. They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. So Psalm 69.

And we see that played out here as the Roman soldiers offer him that drink, which he refuses because he wants to be as conscious as possible in this act of giving himself on our behalf upon the cross.

[19:19] And on the cross, there is the sign in three languages. Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. It's an ironic statement.

An ironic statement, perhaps saying, you want a king and this is as good a king as you're going to get. The king you've got is a loser, a crucified man, crucified at the hands of the occupying empire. But the irony is that the space-time Jesus of Nazareth really was the true king. And that would be demonstrated three days after this event when he rose from the dead.

But here there's irony. There's mockery in this term, Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews. Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

There's irony here too, isn't that James and John had asked that they might be at his right and left hand when he came into the kingdom. They didn't realise that this is what was part of that job description of being right and left hand of Jesus.

[20:34] Jesus is crucified amongst rebels, criminals. And then the camera pans round and everybody seems to want to mock Jesus.

The ordinary passers-by, the Jewish authorities, the teachers of the law, even those two men who were crucified with him, we're told in verse 44.

They heap insults on him. In the following verses, almost everyone gets a chance to insult Jesus. Mockery. It's a tragic thing, isn't it, that the most beautiful person in the universe, the most wonderful figure that there's ever been, is held up to ridicule.

That the one who is true is accused of being false. The one who is the very truth of God, the very faithful witness of God. His veracity is questioned.

And there is a call for him to confirm his identity and to confirm his mission. But the way that the questions are asked, the way that the mockery is couched, suggests that no confirmation will be forthcoming.

[21:57] What's your story, Jesus? What's your story? And in what way is it credible? If you are the Son of God, if you are the Son of God, well, surely your Father will deliver you if you're the Son of God.

But it's quite clear that you're not the Son of God. It's quite clear that you're not the one that you claim to be. You're something else altogether. They ask for proof. But there is no proof.

And quite clearly, there is no proof. If you are the Son of God, what are you still doing upon that cross? That's what they're saying.

So there is no immediate rescue. There is no superhero or band of angels that comes to deliver Jesus from the cross.

A friend of mine wrote this. There will be no Elijah swinging down from heaven, brandishing a sword and cutting Jesus loose from the cross just in the nick of time. There will be no squadron of angels, no army of liberation.

[23:06] No last-minute surprises from Peter and the disciples waiting in the wings for the last chance. This is not a Hollywood movie where the good guy never dies. This is the story of Messiah, who must undergo great suffering and be killed, as he tells his disciples in Matthew 16, verse 21.

It is right. He cannot save himself and save us. What Jesus taught his disciples, again in Matthew 16, verse 25, is whoever saves his life will lose it.

For Jesus to save his life at this point would have scuppered the whole mission plan, the whole rescue package of God for the human race.

It would be human to come down. It was divine to remain hanging upon the cross, obedient to death, even death upon the cross.

There is no immediate, instant gratification. Jesus stays on the cross.

[24:23] He suffers on the cross for us. And of course, this is a reminder that in life there is not always deliverance for those who are suffering.

There are no instant answers for some of life's intractable problems. There are the innocent sufferers who suffer without any prospect of relief.

That's the story of the book of Job, isn't it? It's important for us to recognise that that is true. That sometimes we don't experience deliverance.

We don't experience the rescue in the moment. We are helped in the moment. And we're brought through the experience to ultimate deliverance.

Jesus is upon the cross. He is not rescued by the Father. He is left by the Father upon the cross.

[25:25] Because the ultimate deliverance is yet to come. And it will come. And it always does come. Credibility, though.

He saved others, they said. But he can't save himself. He's the King of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. It's a credibility issue, they say. We will believe if he comes down from the cross.

We want to see a demonstration of the power of the one who is the King of Israel. If he is the King of Israel, show us. Show us that power. But throughout the Gospels, it's made plain that miracles do not compel belief.

Throughout the Bible, that's true. People in the Exodus period, they witnessed great miracles, but they did not believe. People during the Gospel period saw great miracles, but they didn't believe. The ten lepers, ten who were healed of leprosy, nine did not return. One returns. Only one returns. Come down now and we will believe.

[26:32] People still say today, if God gave me a sign, if God did a miracle, if God showed up, then I'd believe. But it's not the case.

God has showed up. God has performed the miracle of God becoming man. God dying on our behalf. God rising from the dead.

God has shown up. And it's important for us to respond to that showing up appropriately. He trusts in God.

Let God rescue him now if he wants him. For he said, I am the Son of God. This is the final word that's expressed.

He trusts in God. Let God rescue him. Now, these are words which are quoted from Psalm 22 and verse 8. That psalm which Jesus himself will use in that sky-piercing cry.

[27:36] My God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Here they throw back at him this statement from Psalm 22.

And say, well, you know, if he is the one who's really trusting in the Father, well, let the Father help him.

Now, this takes us right back to the temptation in the wilderness and the reminder that the tempter comes. And he tempts Jesus and seeks to undermine his confidence in the Father and undermine his identity as the true Son of God.

He is the Son. But here are words which cast doubt upon that. He said, I am the Son of God.

Let God rescue him. Brunner said that religious equations are dangerous. Trusting God should equal help from God, shouldn't it?

[28:46] Isn't that the equation of all religious wisdom? You pray your prayers. You give your money. You pay your dues. You attend on time.

You celebrate the festivals. And God will look out for you. That's what the friends of Job said. You know, it's quite plain, Job.

You know, if you keep your nose clean, you do all the right things. Well, then life will turn out well. Life has not turned out well for you. Therefore, you put a foot wrong somewhere. It's plain.

You know what it's like? It's like putting the money in the chocolate machine. You put the coin in and out comes the chocolate bar. If you've not got the chocolate bar, you've not put in the coin.

Jesus, if you trust the Father, he would surely rescue you.

He wouldn't let you die on the cross. Surely not. It's impossible. How can you say that you are the Son of God and be abandoned in this way?

[29:48] I am the Son of God. Of course, that is something in the message of this Gospel. In Matthew 3, verse 17, at the baptism of Jesus, heaven speaks.

This is my Son, whom I love, whom I am well pleased. On the night of transfiguration, the voice from heaven. This is my Son. Listen to him.

This is the testimony concerning the identity of Jesus. He is the true Son of God. And he has come on a mission of salvation that involves the cross. He is the Messiah.

He is Christ crucified. Foolishness, weakness to human ears and eyes, but the wisdom and power of God to those who believe.

But it's a mystery, isn't it? It's a mystery that the one who claims to be the Son of God should be suffering in this way. How can someone who is the true Son of God be as foolish as to end up on a cross?

[30:56] Well, of course, it seems as though God's hands are tied. And it seems as though the hands of Jesus are tied. And they are. But only because they've allowed them to be tied. Jesus is like Aslan the lion in the lion, the witch, and the wardrobe.

Allowing the white witch to tie him up and place him on the stone table that he too might be sacrificed.

That the deep magic might be released that reverses the reign of death in the world. Jesus is the Son of God.

The way that he demonstrates that is not by jumping off the cross, but by staying on the cross for us. Moments after this, Jesus dies.

And when Jesus dies, ironically, remarkably, a representative of the Roman Empire, a representative of power, says these words that you'll be looking at next week.

[32:09] Truly, this man was the Son of God. Here's a man, part of the detail, looking after the crucifixion of Jesus. Who has seen a few things in his life.

Who's seen a few people die. Who's seen bravery. Who's seen nobility. And here in the life and death of Jesus, he sees a nobility that he's never seen before. Caesars were called saviors and sons of God.

They were terms used of the imperial leaders. And this man, therefore, is not lightly saying, truly this man was the Son of God.

Whether it's a statement of faith or not, we don't know. But it does echo the truth that the one who is being ridiculed for being Son of God, King of Israel, trusting the Father, and there seemingly being no outcome, that he recognises the truth.

And, of course, this is the first aspect of the vindication of the one who has been so severely ridiculed. It's interesting that one of the things that the crowd say is that you said you're going to destroy the temple and raise it up in three days.

[33:29] Well, come down from the cross, show us your power. After the event of the confession of the centurion, the curtain in the temple is torn in two, rendering inoperable the whole sacrificial system.

Because the true temple, Jesus, the true sacrifice. Has offered to the Father full payment for our sin.

Jesus died upon the cross. He was crucified. He died that we might be forgiven. He died that we might be forgiven.

The camera that panned around those who surrounded the cross of Jesus continues to span the human race.

And it spans those who are logging into this service at Calvary Church today. And the camera trains its lens on me and you.

[34:37] And the camera looks for a response. Is it a response of incredulity? I can't believe that this one upon the cross is the creator of the universe.

Or is it a response of trembling trust. Wondering awe. That the creator of the universe is willing to live and die for you and for me.

Is it a response that says, I do believe, I will believe that Jesus died for me.

That on the cross, he shed his blood from sin to set me free. The camera spans this congregation as you sit in your homes and watch your screens.

What is your response? Incredulity or faith? We visited that scene where the Son of God died for us.

[35:54] And Christian people put that at the very centre and heart of their lives here on earth. So we'll close with a prayer.

And then we'll play out, as it were, with that song. Jesus, thank you. The mystery of the cross I cannot comprehend. But thank you, Lord Jesus. Lord, for what we've heard and thought about, we give you our thanks.

And pray that as we go into this new week, whatever it may hold, we may do so, as Paul did, in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

So now may grace and mercy and peace be with each one of us, from God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for evermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So there's goodbye to me just now, and we play out with the song, Jesus, thank you. The mystery of the cross I cannot comprehend.

[37:15] The agonies of Calvary. You, the perfect Holy One, Christ, your Son, who drank the bitter cup reserved for me.

Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus, thank you.

Once your enemy, now seated at your table, Jesus, thank you.

By your perfect sacrifice I've been brought near.

Your enemy you've made your friend. Pouring out the riches of your glorious grace, your mercy and your kindness knows no end.

[38:35] Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus, thank you.

Once your enemy, now seated at your table, Jesus, thank you.

Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you.

I want to live for you. I want to live for you. Lover of my soul, I want to live for you.

Lover of my soul, I want to live for you. Lover of my soul, I want to live for you.

[40:00] Your blood has washed away my sin, Jesus, thank you. The Father's wrath completely satisfied, Jesus, thank you.

Once your enemy, now seated at your table, Jesus, thank you.

You're ending.