

The crucifixion

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[0 : 00] And we're going to consider this morning the account of the crucifixion and touching on the burial of Jesus as well.! Just three observations to bring to you before we get into this together.

! One from the news, one from Brighton, and one personally. Just briefly, firstly from the news. You may have heard of a man called Justin Briley, who often speaks through a premier radio, has a podcast called The Surprising Rebirth of Faith in God.

He wrote an article in The Spectator magazine this week, where he explains to all who listen that he's observing a return to belief in God.

He calls it the rise of the new theists. He says that the new atheists, their great push from Dawkins, etc., have not won the day. And he's seeing people around slowly come back to considering God and the implications of living in a country and a Western society that has been really moulded around the implications of the Christian faith.

[1 : 11] So that was quite interesting. Maybe there is a movement going on of people coming back to some kind of awareness of the divine of God. Maybe you've seen that. We pray for that.

The observation from Brighton was this morning as I walked down. We lived just above five ways. I was walking down the Ditchling Road. And there was a huge queue of people. I thought, wow, this is amazing.

Maybe they're queuing to go to St. Matthias, just over the road. Maybe it's a good Friday walk. But do you know what they were doing? They were queuing outside to get their hot cross buns from Raven's Bakery.

Now, they are really good hot cross buns. If you want any food, a seasonal food, go to Raven's Bakery. It's amazing. But I just thought, isn't that interesting? Yes, there may be a movement of more people being aware of God and the spiritual need in their lives.

But very much in our society, we still think of Easter in terms of eggs or hot cross buns. But then I thought, it's the cross, isn't it?

[2 : 10] You don't just want a return to some awareness of God. Everyone in this story had an awareness of the divine of God. What we want is a return to Jesus and to the cross.

So don't be happy with just an excitement about some people saying, I think there's a God. Our job is to live and to proclaim the cross of Christ. For there is the power of salvation for Brighton.

So let's not give up on that. Let's stand firm. Maybe we've had to stand firm. But maybe it's the day for the proclamation to be swept along by the wind of the Spirit.

And we'll see many come into the kingdom. The third observation is to do that, of course. It's to do with that. And that's the importance of us revolving our lives and standing by the cross.

I'm so pleased that we were able to sing Samuel Crossman's hymn from the 1600s as we began our song. And all this week I've had in my mind going around that last verse.

[3 : 13] Here might I stay and sing. No story so divine. Never was love, dear King. Never was grief like thine at the cross.

This is my friend in whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend. I will align my life with Jesus.

I stand with him at his crucifixion and his resurrection. Samuel Crossman, of course, was an Anglican minister during a very turbulent time for the Anglican church in the 1600s.

That's one of the reasons it's been going around in my head. But I'm so glad that we could sing that at the beginning of our time together and pray for the churches, the church around the country. Now let's come to this passage, shall we, in Luke's Gospel.

It may be the story that we're reminded of every year, but that's the point. It's the historical events. It happened on that day so many years ago. And we remind ourselves of the crucifixion and on

Sunday of the resurrection of Jesus.

[4 : 19] And just look at verse 49 of chapter 23. Verse 49. We're told there that while all this happened to our Lord Jesus Christ, we're told that all who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things.

So for a few minutes this morning, I want us who represent churches here in Brighton, who I believe follow Jesus too, to join with those first followers who are no doubt confused on that day as they stand and watch the crucifixion of their Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

When I woke up this morning and I looked out of our back window, there was utter carnage in our garden. Utter carnage. The wind had swept through during the night and decking furniture and everything was everywhere.

Thankfully the house was still standing. But I wonder if that is how they felt as they saw these events unfold before them. Yes, Jesus had predicted his death and his sufferings.

Had they really taken that in? And as they stood there at a distance watching, they saw the utter carnage of the Messiah, their Lord and Saviour, who they knew and loved, crucified and killed.

[5 : 42] Well, let us stay with them for a moment. Let us watch with them. And let us be strengthened in our faith to see that out of the carnage comes something truly special for us and for the world.

Let us see in verses 33 to 38 the crucifixion of Jesus. We are going to stand with them in verses 39 to 43 to see the criminals conversing around Jesus.

And then in verses 44 to 49, we see how we and those standing there come to the conclusion of the whole matter as to why Jesus had died.

Let us see in verse 33, first of all, Jesus crucified. Standing at a distance, by faith we're there.

And we see the crucifixion of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We've read about the procession that has just happened after the mockery of his trial and the injustice of Pilate who caved in to the crowds.

[6 : 46] But this procession from Jerusalem has now come to Golgotha, but it's been led by Jesus, who is himself led, we believe, by the Roman soldiers. Jesus is followed by Simon, the North African, who has been seized and forced to carry the heavy wooden beam upon which the Lord Jesus will be nailed.

And they are followed by this large crowd, many of whom a few days earlier would have been waving palm branches and yelling out, Hosanna, Hosanna, the Lord says, let it is here who comes in the name of the Lord.

And now they've been turned and joined in the crying out of crucify him, crucify him. And they follow to see the spectacle of his execution. We're told also that there were women who mourned and lamented over him, maybe sensing something of the injustice of what is happening.

The procession comes out of Jerusalem and soon ends at that place of execution, Golgotha, the place called the skull, known in Latin as Calvaria, Calvary.

And there, without any graphic description, Luke tells us they observed Jesus crucified. Along with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

[8 : 12] Luke writes it matter-of-factly, but oh, to have been there, to have seen it, which those early followers of Jesus did.

The Roman soldiers who were skilled in this work of crucifixion would have stretched out his arms upon that wooden beam that Simon carried and ruthlessly, mercilessly hammered his arms to that beam through the hands or through the wrists.

Then that wooden beam, with his arms outstretched, would have been placed onto that vertical pole on the ground probably at this time. and then the whole thing raised up after his feet had been hammered to the pole.

Lifted up, Jesus naked, humiliated, in agony, to slowly suffocate and die the death of a traitor against Rome and the worst of criminals.

This is my friend. Next to him go the two criminals, literally in this version the lawbreakers, one on his left, one on his right.

[9 : 33] They are experiencing the consequences of their lawbreaking against the Roman Empire. But as we, with those crowds of early followers, stand at that distance and observe the Lord of heaven and earth crucified on the cross, remarkably, as he is lifted up, we hear him praying and praying for forgiveness.

Not for himself. He had nothing that needed forgiveness for, but for the soldiers who had done that desperate deed. Father, he prays, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing. Luke later says that though the Lord Jesus was delivered up according to God's determined plan and foreknowledge, he describes Peter explaining to his fellow Israelites that you used lawless men, these soldiers, to nail him to a cross and kill him.

The Roman soldiers no doubt thought that they were the law, the law of Rome, but they were ignorant of God. The Bible describes them as lawless themselves, ignorant of what they were doing to the Son of God.

But Jesus, as he is raised up on that cross, prays, Father, forgive them. forgiveness is found even at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus from his lips to those who are abusing him.

[11:12] Could there even be forgiveness issued and given? Could there be repentance and forgiveness of sin even to these soldiers who are doing this desperate deed? what we read on we'll find out a little bit later.

As Jesus cries out forgiveness, as we're standing there, as we're observing that terrible scene, then we hear the taunts begin. How cruel to kick a man when he is down anyway.

And Jesus gets it from every angle. He gets it from the leaders, he gets it from the soldiers, he even gets it from one of the criminals who are crucified beside him on the cross. They mock him, scoff at him and yell insults at him.

There's something about human nature that loves to kick a man when he is down and to take the king of love and life and kick him.

The crowds. While we stand at a distance and watch men made strange and none long for Christ would know.

[12:25] Crucify at that moment is all their breath and for his death they thirst and cry. Of course, if you recognize in the readings as we stand with his followers and listen and watch and observe what is going on, as they taunt him they speak of more than they know, don't they?

There are three taunts from these people. From the leaders, the soldiers and the criminal beside him on the cross and every taunt speaks of salvation.

Salvation. Salvation. The Messiah, God's Messiah, the chosen one say the leaders, he saved others, why isn't he saving himself?

The king of the Jews, that was the sign that was written above his head, the king of the Jews, say the soldiers, save yourself if you are. And then the criminal says, you're supposed to be the Messiah, save yourself and us, he blasphemes at Jesus.

We hear their mockery on that day. We hear something of the mockery today as Jesus as Jesus is either ignored or ridiculed.

[13:50] Yet, as he speaks of forgiveness, there is salvation at the cross. The book of Acts, it goes on to say, records followers of Jesus saying things like, be saved from this corrupt generation.

Speaking of Jesus on the cross. there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved, they said.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, Paul told the jailer. So today, we who know him stand at a distance watching these things as if by faith, along with those early followers, as they saw the carnage, but within the carnage, there is forgiveness hinted at and salvation ironically spoken of.

It's the crucifixion. Secondly, in verse 39, we have this conversation between the criminals around Jesus. The first criminal, of course, has yelled his insults at Jesus but the other criminal rebukes him and he probably has the most important conversation of his entire life.

right at the end. Don't you even fear God? He speaks over Jesus to the other guy since you're undergoing the same punishment that we are.

[15:21] The same punishment as Jesus is. We're punished justly because we're getting back what we deserve for the things that we have done. Remember, they're described here as criminals or law breakers and we're being punished justly but this man in the middle has done nothing wrong.

It's interesting, isn't it, that this criminal, even in his most desperate state, as he rebukes the other criminal, shows that there is a fear of God in him. there is an awareness of his guilt morally and there's an awareness of the goodness and the righteousness of Jesus.

Something's going on, isn't it? That's the thing to pray for actually in our society. A fear of God, the holy, creator and sovereign before whom we will give an account.

An awareness of guilt and sin. An awareness of the goodness, the perfection, the beauty of Jesus. That second criminal then says the most important words of his entire life, possibly one of the last things that he will say something of what he's recorded as he says. He prays as Jesus spoke to his father about forgiveness for others. So the man turns to Jesus to seek that forgiveness.

[16:56] One writer says this is the most, one of the most eloquent evidences of faith in the Bible. The criminal says to Jesus Jesus, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom. He believes Jesus is the Messiah. He believes that his death now so close is not the end.

He has a fear of God and he knows he will meet God one day. He believes there is a kingdom of God coming that Jesus is bringing about.

So he fears God, he knows he's guilty, he knows that Jesus is righteous and good, he presumes nothing, but he throws himself on that desperate moment at the end of his life on the mercy and power of Jesus to save him.

Jesus, remember me. Well, the violent offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

[18:14] and Jesus says to that man, truly I tell you, he assures you, him, truly I tell you, today something immediate is going to happen, your forgiveness and your acceptance before God.

You personally will be with me in paradise. the man's acceptance before God and admission into heaven, paradise, can come in one way only.

He can't come by his good works, he hasn't got time for any. It comes through being joined to with Jesus who dies and rises again.

today you will be with me in paradise. So as we stand, those of us who know Jesus, by faith with those early followers of Jesus, as they see the carnage, they see also something glorious happening.

Forgiveness, salvation, conversion. Do you believe? conversion?

[19:51] Well, we come to the last point which is the conclusion of the matter from verse 44. First of all, in verse 44, there's the conclusion of heaven about what has just happened at the cross.

Darkness comes on the land for three hours, symbolically showing that there is judgment from above and wrath from a holy God pouring out down upon Christ at the cross.

Innocent, perfect Jesus. Like a lightning conductor, Jesus at that moment is taking on the wrath of God that was deserved by the criminal and by all who by grace alone will put their faith in Jesus Christ.

It comes upon Jesus. The darkness descends. The judgment is poured out on the Messiah, the chosen one. For this is how this criminal can be admitted into paradise.

His guilt and condemnation before God have been taken by the good and righteous Jesus as a gift from God to say you are accepted.

[21:11] And you are admitted. His friend has paid. Save has been the taunt. But by not saving himself Jesus paid the price for many to be saved.

And everyone like the criminal who would admit their sin and guilt before a holy God and call upon the name of Jesus will be saved. And of course the conclusion of heaven verse 4 is you're welcome.

Verse 45 rather. For the darkness descends and the curtain of the temple sanctuary. The great keep out sign curtain between the holy place where God was symbolically dwelt and where others were allowed was then ripped in two from top to bottom.

The way to God the way to heaven the way to paradise has now been opened through Jesus and the cross. And so what do we see as we gather with those first followers looking at a distance that Jesus now having paid the price of sin fully and entirely calls out with a loud voice a cry based on the psalms full of confidence and trust Father into your hands I entrust my spirit and saying this he breathes his last the Messiah dies the conclusion from heaven the curtain is turning to the darkness lifts the price it has been paid did you notice that the three groups who taunt

Jesus the leaders the soldiers the criminals out of each of those groups someone is saved the criminal we've seen Lord Jesus remember me the soldiers or what about the centurion the chief of the soldiers when he sees how Jesus has died he's observed it he's seen it he starts to praise God the Roman centurion starts to praise God and says surely this man was righteous this man was

innocent in other words I believe he is who he said he was and he starts to praise God and then the story goes on because not only was there a criminal saved not only was there a soldier saved but actually as

[24 : 20] Jesus has died who should go up and ask for his body to be taken down from the cross but one of the leaders Joseph of Arimathea none of these people came out as followers of Jesus Christ when things were going well they aligned themselves with Jesus in his death because they saw in his death there was their life the criminal remember me the soldier praising God surely this was a righteous man and Joseph of Arimathea!

who had power and status in his society and had no reason to be known publicly and to align himself as a follower of Jesus in his death goes publicly to Pontius Pilate and he asks for his body and he lays his body respectfully in this new tomb they align themselves not just with belief in God not just with Jesus but they align themselves with Jesus crucified for there is their life friends today in some sense we have stood at a distance with those who knew him with those who followed him but will we stand with him and align ourselves with him in his crucifixion for there is the heart of the gospel the righteous

Jesus receiving the righteous condemnation of God for all of my sin and there I find my forgiveness and righteousness and acceptance as Joseph of Arimathea said by his actions I follow the crucified and buried Messiah who died to give me forgiveness salvation and access with him to heaven I am with Jesus what about you yes Jesus has been laid to rest the work is finished he's been laid to rest in honour as one writer says but things will not remain quiet for long were they but just at this moment we who called ourselves Christians who by grace know him and maybe at a distance have to observe what only he could do reflect in our hearts and say here might we always stay and sing no story so divine never was love dear king never was grief like thine this is my friend in whose sweet praise

I all my days could gladly spend I really hope there is a revival of people becoming more aware of God that the new theists will grow but more than that whether it be ones or twos or thousands may people find that Jesus is their friend who died for their sins let's pray shall we