

The death of Jesus: his arrest

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Date: 20 March 2013

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[0 : 00] So we're in John chapter 18 and the plan is that we'll continue working through John looking at the story as we come up to Easter because that's what we are coming up to Easter because that's what we are coming up to Easter.

In whose sweet praise I all my days could gladly spend. Beautiful poem really set to music. I think in the version we have in praise I'm not sure whether all of those words make their way through to the modern English but I thought this would be a good heading for us.

There's no story so divine as the story of Jesus as he goes to the cross. So let me ask you what is the truth behind life?

What is the truth behind your life? What is the truth that you're basing your life upon? Western atheism if we take it seriously says that actually the truth of the universe is that it's random and chaotic and somehow it seems to generate meaning and beauty and people.

Goodness knows how that can possibly happen if it's just chance material that's got flung together by atomic explosions over long periods of time. So what's the truth behind it?

[1 : 39] Well I think there's no truth behind it would be the idea of Western atheism. All over the place. That's the air we breathe that tells us there's no particular truth behind our lives.

Here is another suggestion that the truth behind the universe is a sort of timeless one.

That everything is all one. And it all somehow combines together as one or something like that. I'm sort of doing little more than guessing.

Is that what Buddhism teaches? I don't know. It's a suggestion. So I offer that. That was one thing. Is that what's behind our lives? I know that when I was in Sri Lanka one section of the population is Buddhist.

The other section of the population is Hindu. And I do know that Hindus say that the truth is there are many gods. There are millions of gods. So that's you have to base your life in that sort of idea.

[2 : 44] In the Bible it says that there is one god in three persons. And that this god stepped down into human history.

And that that is the truth behind the universe. That's Christianity. I can say that with confidence. And the focus of that reality is 2,000 years ago on a hill in a Middle Eastern city where there were three crosses.

And the person, the people on the two outer crosses were receiving capital punishment for crimes, perhaps terrorism, insurrection.

But the person in the Middle Cross was different. And Christianity says that that is the key to the whole of life, the universe and everything.

What took place on that day when God stooped down into human history and died on the cross.

And that's where the history of the world focuses on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 01] And so what we're going to do for the next few minutes is to look at this divine story, or this human story actually, of the cross as told to us by the Apostle John.

So let's turn to the text. We're in John chapter 18.

Let's not forget chapters 1 to 17. John believes that the book that he's written contains the key to eternal life.

He tells us himself that he's selected his material. Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book.

But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[5 : 05] That's why he's written the book. He's been reading about John Wesley, the very famous 18th century evangelist who travelled the length and breadth of the United Kingdom and beyond.

And in one of his speeches he says, There's a book in which we find eternal life. Give me that book. Get me that book.

That's the book that we've got in front of us just now. As I say, the last few chapters concern the death of Jesus.

And this is the same with all the four Gospels in the Christian Bible in the New Testament. They tell the story of the death of Jesus.

And it's very interesting that they tell this story in considerable detail. It's almost like slow motion.

[6 : 06] They've sort of whizzed through the first 30 years. But on the last few hours of Jesus' life, they give us considerable details. And I presume they do that for a reason.

But they haven't. They've been working towards this from the word go, in fact. So if you were to look at John 1.29, you'll see right at the beginning of John's Gospel, Jesus is announced as, this is John the Baptist announces Jesus as, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Right at the beginning, John the Baptist says, look, there's Jesus. Who is he? He's the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And we might ask, why does he say Jesus is the Lamb of God and not the squirrel of God or the badger of God or something like that for the reason that the Lamb is a sacrificial animal.

And right at the beginning, he's saying, this is Jesus who is going to die as a sacrifice as the Lambs have been doing in the temple for years and years and years.

[7 : 30] They shed their blood to deal with the sin of the people. And Jesus is the Lamb who will die a sacrificial death.

If you think of John chapter 3, a very famous chapter, verse 16 is the one that a lot of people remember, but I'm thinking of verse 14, where Jesus says, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

It's an interesting thing to say, isn't it? Jesus says, he is like, or it will be like, when Moses, a long time ago, in the desert, in the history of Israel, lifted up a snake that had actually been made out of bronze and it was nailed to a pole and held up.

And all the people who had been bitten by snakes and were about to die could look at this bronze snake and they were cured of snake bite. And Jesus makes this very fascinating, what is it, a metaphor or a simile?

Whatever it is, he says, is it? Just as, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.

[8 : 59] So I don't think Jesus is saying he's going to be made into bronze, but he's going to be saying that there's just, that snake was nailed to that pole. Jesus is going to be nailed to something wooden and lifted up.

The snake in the original was guilty. It was the animal that had been attacking the people of God. It was disgraced. It was the enemy. That's why it was nailed up on the pole.

It was lifted up. It was impaled and humiliated. So people could go, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, to the snake in the desert.

And they looked at that snake and they were cured. And Jesus says, there's a parallel. I'm going to be disgraced and humiliated and nailed to something and lifted up.

And people are going to go, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, to me. And that will be the way that people are cured of something actually worse than snake bite.

[9 : 58] They're going to be cured of sin by looking at me with a look of faith. And Jesus said that all the way back in chapter 3. I'm going to be like the snake lifted up in the desert.

In chapter 6, verse 53, Jesus has been talking about himself being the bread of life. And bread seems a fairly innocuous and benign substance.

So you could happily earn a living making things out of bread and be a vegetarian and do that. And Jesus goes on to spoil it all by saying in the next verse, I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.

And he suddenly makes it all unpleasant and bloodthirsty and carnivorous and unpleasant, cannibalistic almost. Jesus says, you've got to somehow benefit from me not just in eating bread, but eating my flesh and drinking my blood, which is a sort of disgusting thought.

But Jesus says, well that's the way you're going to benefit from me because this eating flesh and drinking blood involves death. And there is no way you're going to benefit from me unless there

happens to me this violent, unpleasant, gory death.

[11 : 30] And that's the way that you will benefit. And if you haven't got the stomach for it, you won't benefit from me. That's what Jesus says and the people who were listening didn't have the stomach for it.

They were disgusted and turned away. And Jesus there in chapter 6 is talking about life by the intake of the benefits of His violent death.

And I think He's actually talking about faith in this very, very vivid way. So, there's many other references as well but I don't want to become too technical but I'm simply saying that if we look at chapter 18 we have to remember that all the other 17 chapters have happened already and they have said that Jesus is going to die and He's going to die for this particular purpose.

Are we okay? Shall we go to chapter 18? Does that make sense? Did that quite quickly. So let's see, let's I don't think I can offer you anything more than simply going through the text and stopping and listening to it and observing the sort of connections that are offered to us in the text.

So let's look at 18.1-3 When He had finished praying Jesus left with His disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove and He and His disciples went into it.

[12 : 56] Now Judas who betrayed Him knew the place because Jesus had often met there with His disciples. So Judas came to the grove guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees and they were carrying torches and lanterns and weapons.

Jesus knowing that all was going to all that was going to happen to Him went out. Let's just picture that scene. We've got a meeting and we have two groups of people going to the meeting.

We have Jesus so I've drawn on here a house and a path leading down into a valley and then up the other side into a garden. And Jesus had finished praying chapter 18 verse 1 interestingly John doesn't mention prayer in the garden of Gethsemane he doesn't tell the story exactly the way that the others do but he still tells the same story.

So I've put over the top of that prayer that Jesus had left the place of prayer and was probably going to the place of prayer. We think of the other group of people that are going there that's Judas leading the way and a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees so they've gone along with their lamps and torches and weapons and it's an interesting contrast isn't it?

Jesus goes there under the heading of prayer and these guys go to meet him equipped with artificial light torches and lamps and an array of weapons.

[14 : 58] It's an interesting combination isn't it? I think we'll see that contrast develop as the sort of methodology of God versus the methodology of humanity without God.

Jesus uses prayer and the other lot use humanly generated light and weapons. I think that's a good way to meet Jesus.

A couple of other things as we set the scene here. It says that Jesus knew all that was going to happen to him. And as we go through the story we get this really very strong sense that it is all pre-planned.

It isn't a random tragic accident but Jesus knows completely what's going to happen. And he very deliberately embraces this plan as we shall see.

So Jesus knew. And the other ingredient is Judas the betrayer. Just a little thing about the vocabulary here. We have different words for betray, traitor, and hand over.

[16 : 12] But in the original that would all be one word meaning really to hand over. And the word crops up quite a number of times. It's there in verse 2.

Judas the hander over. It's in verse 5. Judas the hander over. The one who is going to hand Jesus over. It's also in verse 30.

If he were not a criminal the Jews replied we would not have handed him over to you. Same word. And in verse 35. It was your people and the chief priests who handed you over to me.

And it's also there in verse 36. If it was so my servants would fight to prevent my handing over by the Jews translated their arrest.

All this idea of Jesus being handed over put into the power of his enemies put into the power of this hostile murderous community which our world actually is.

[17 : 23] So let's move on and look at the next few verses the handing over itself. So verse 4.

Jesus knowing all that was going to happen to him went out and asked who is it you want or more literally who do you seek Jesus of Nazareth they replied I am he Jesus said and Judas the hander

over was standing there with them when Jesus said I am he they drew back and fell to the ground it all seems to sort of grind to a halt and it's Jesus who pushes the movement forward the action forward again he asked them who is it you want who do you seek And they said Jesus of Nazareth I told you if

Jesus takes the initiative he goes forward and says who do you seek and they say Jesus of Nazareth he replies I am he and they fall to the ground so that's perhaps the situation we might have in our minds for this scene rather remarkable isn't it rather remarkable this repeated question who do you seek a very penetrating question who do you seek who is it that you're looking for these people say they've come looking for Jesus but they've come equipped with weapons with lanterns as if Jesus were hiding as if Jesus were going to beat them up as if Jesus was a dangerous criminal is that really who you're seeking who is it you're seeking you've come with your weapons who are you looking for it's a very very good question actually it's a profound question who do you seek who do you seek who do you seek who are you looking for what sort of person do you look for in your life what sort of person do you take

Jesus to be who do you seek wonderful question and then Jesus answer I am he I am he three words in English not quite sure how many words it was in the original but just imagine there in the darkness with the flickering light of the torches and the excitement of this posse of police and army and everything surrounding Jesus and Jesus says I am he and such is the composure of Jesus such is the inflection of his voice such is the the gravity of his person that he just has to say those words and everybody falls down that's what happened and there's a particular significance to those words because

I am he he would have I don't know whether he spoke it in Greek or Aramaic but in Hebrew in the language of the Old Testament I am he is a way of expressing exactly who God is do you remember back in Exodus Moses said if I tell the people God has sent me who am I supposed to say whose name shall I give and the Lord God said I am who I am tell them I am has sent you and that's what Jesus says who do you seek Jesus of Nazareth I am says Jesus died died died died died died died died and then Jesus has to sort of get the action going again.

Verse 7, he says, he asks them again, who is it that you want? Come on guys, you're up here for something, you're not just down here to worship, are you? You've come on a mission, what were you doing?

[22 : 45] Just come on, snap out of it a minute. Oh yes, we're up here to arrest somebody. Who do you want? Jesus of Nazareth. I said, that's me, I am he. And then Jesus says, if you're looking for me, let these others go.

And John, as he tells us the story, gives us a little interpretation as he goes along. This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled.

I have not lost one of those you gave me. And Jesus had prayed along those lines earlier, and it's also been commented earlier, that Jesus had been given a group of people to protect and keep, and not one of them would be lost, except the one who was actually earmarked for that, Judas, the son of perdition, as it was said.

Jesus says, let these men go, and off they scamper. And we see a little reflection here of Jesus' protection of his people. He stood there and said, I'm protecting them.

If you've got something nasty to do, do it to me, but let them go. And we've got, also it tells us, the fulfilment of his words. He did this so that his words would be fulfilled.

[24 : 05] Interesting about the words of Jesus, isn't it? You and I, I'm sorry it's true, we make promises, but we don't keep them, do we? So we often say, see you later, without the slightest intention of seeing anybody at any time at all.

It's just a way of, when Jesus said something, he meant it. And he said, I'm going to keep these people, and here he is doing it. He said this so that these words would be fulfilled. I have not lost one of those you gave me.

And there's one other thing happening as the story advances this way. We see Jesus, who did have a lot of disciples, now having fewer disciples, and at this point, he's got a little band with him, but they all run away.

And as I hope we will see, as we go through this, Jesus becomes more and more alone. Jesus stands more and more alone. Because Peter had earlier promised, I'll stand with you.

If everybody else runs away, I won't run away. But we'll see that that doesn't happen. And what Jesus goes and does, he does not with our help, or as part of a team.

[25 : 18] What Jesus goes and does, he goes and does exactly on his own, while we just remain the people who benefit from it, and contribute nothing.

So let's move on through the story. Jesus has said, let these men go. Another little detail that John gives us, is the bit about the sword.

And Simon Peter, who presumably hasn't run away yet, had a sword, and he drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

Interesting little eyewitness details. John tells the story, from his own point of view, and he's got some background to this. He seems to know some of these people.

A little bit like, when I was in Sri Lanka, every now and again, you'd find, somebody would say, oh you know, Pastor so and so, or such and such a person, did you realise, that they're married to their cousin, or that his sister is her husband, his sister is his husband.

[26 : 34] And you think, oh I didn't realise that was connection. But there are all these little connections, behind the scene. And here, we're going to get one, where John, seems with his family business, to know something about the high priest, and what's going on, in the high priest's, household.

So Simon, who has a sword, thinks it would be a good idea, to cut off the ear, of the servant. I think probably not a, not a very well aimed, blow.

I don't know anything about, sword fighting, open to correction. Any of you know more about it, but I wouldn't have thought, it was very lethal, to chop somebody's ear off. All that does, is prevent anybody hearing things.

Which actually, is not, really very helpful, for the gospel. Because you want, as many ears as possible. You don't want to be reducing, the number of ears. So, Simon Peter, takes a sword, cuts off, the guy's ear.

And there's an interesting, reply from Jesus. Put your sword away. Shall I not drink, the cup, the Father's given me. So, Peter's, on the track of swords, and Jesus, on the track of cups.

[27 : 49] Shall I not drink, the cup, the Father, has given me. Very interesting, isn't it? Jesus, Peter goes about it one way, and Jesus goes about it, another way.

The cup, you know in Gethsemane, in the other gospels, that it's, Jesus says, let this cup pass from me. Now, we don't have the prayer, in Gethsemane, recorded by John, but he does make reference, to the cup.

And, in the Old Testament, the cup, is, often, certainly got one example, here.

I haven't done enough research, to tell you whether it's always, but it's certainly, often, a reference, to, the punishment, that God gives the wicked.

So, for example, in Psalm 75, which was, I think, just the first reference, that came up on my list. Psalm 75, verse 8.

[28 : 53] It is God who judges, he brings down, brings one down, he exalts another. In the hand of the Lord, is a cup, full of foaming wine, mixed with spices.

He pours it out, and the wicked of the earth, drink it down, to its very dregs. It's a, cup, this, is a cup of judgment. And it's the wicked, who drink this, as a recompense, for their wickedness.

God says, you've been wicked. And that has, in doing that, you've, you've ordered, a pint of this. And there it is, you drink it.

And it's a cup of judgment. And that's, the way Jesus, sees what's going to happen to him. He says, we're not talking about swords, we're not talking about, killing people.

What it is, I've got a cup to drink. And the Father, has given it to me. And it's not a pleasant cup. But I'm going to drink it. I'm going to drink, that cup of judgment.

[29 : 55] And again, we see that, the way, that Peter was going, was force or violence. And Jesus says, that's not the way. But the way, is by, substitutionary, sacrifice.

That cup, didn't belong to Jesus. He didn't deserve that cup. That cup, belonged to us. That's the cup, that we should be drinking. And Jesus says, that's what I'm going to drink, that.

That's the cup, the Father has given to me. And I'm going to do it. I'm going to, do his will, and finish his work. Let's move on.

Let's look at, the trials, that take place. It's quite complex. And I was, I was pondering, why is it so complex? Well, I suppose the answer is, it just was. It's difficult, to tell the story, of complicated things.

As one of our dear sisters, often says, does she not, cutting a long story short. It's quite difficult, to cut a long story short. But, John, tells us the story, and he, he gives us some details, that others don't give.

[31 : 05] So here we go, in verse 12. Then the detachment of soldiers, with its commanders, with its commander, and the Jewish officials, arrested Jesus. They bound him, and brought him first, to Annas, who was the father-in-law, of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.

Caiaphas, was the one, who had advised the Jews, that it would be good, if one man, died for the people. A little bit of background here. In the Old Testament, there was only supposed to be, one high priest, for life.

But, it looks as though, in the times of Jesus, it had become a, what do you call it, when you rotate a post. Somebody has it for one year, and somebody has it for the next year, and somebody has it for the year after.

And it seemed to be, within the family, of Annas, who was, the sort of, senior high priest, but his, was it son-in-law, took the post, for this particular year.

So there's a little bit of a, complexity about that. And the thing that I didn't, write down, but I, would like us to note, Caiaphas, had actually acted as a prophet, earlier on.

[32 : 11] And he had said, it would be a good thing, to avoid, a riot, to avoid, disturbance, to avoid, bad things happening, to the community.

If we could just get rid of one person, whether he's guilty or not, in fact, knowing that he's innocent, if we get one person to die, for the community, that would be the way out.

And he was talking about, getting rid of Jesus, because of all the trouble, that he caused. But he spoke better, than he knew. It was Caiaphas, who had said, it would be good, if one man, died for the people.

And John picks that out. That's what's happening. One man is dying, for the people. So let's, follow on, the story. Jesus is seized, and bound, and Simon Peter, and another disciple, which we presume is John, he doesn't give us his name, but, we presume it's John, Simon Peter, and another disciple, were following Jesus.

Because this disciple, was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus, into the high priest's courtyard. But Peter, had to wait outside, at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl, on duty there, and brought Peter in.

[33 : 29] So here's Peter, waiting at the door, and here's the girl, who's, the bouncer, for that evening. And she says, okay, you can come in, because your friend says, you're okay.

But while, he's going through the door, the girl says, eh, slight northern accent there, Peter. Face looks slightly familiar.

You're not one of these men's disciples, are you? Says the girl at the door. Good opportunity for Peter, isn't it? You're not one of these men's disciples, are you?

One of this man's disciples? No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, nothing to do with him.

Oh. It was cold, and the servants and officials stood round a fire they had made to keep warm.

[34 : 37] And Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. Let's go inside and find out what's happening there. Inside, this is Annas, the sort of high priest senior, who is interviewing Jesus before it gets to a more formal hearing, I think.

The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Tell us about your disciples, tell us about your teaching. Now, I'm not absolutely certain about this, and I don't think anybody is, but there's the strong suggestion that the correct legal procedure was not to ask the defendant, but to ask witnesses for an objective view of what crimes this person had committed.

And Jesus says, I've always taught openly to the world. I taught in the synagogues or at the temple where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me?

Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said. I think Jesus is saying that's the proper legal procedure. You get witnesses and you ask them. And I haven't said something different in public to what I say in secret.

You know, I'm not somebody who has a hidden agenda. I mean, I have spoken to my disciples, but I haven't said anything different to what I said to everybody else. To which Jesus gets slapped in the face.

[36 : 10] And the official says, is this the way you answered the high priest? Nothing like a good slap in the face to advance the cause of justice. To which Jesus replies, is if I said something evil,

kakos meaning bad, nasty, if I said something evil, testify what is evil.

But if I spoke good, if I spoke galos, goodness, truth, why did you strike me? It's all telling stuff, isn't it?

What sort of speech does Jesus speak? He speaks open stuff, he doesn't speak hidden stuff, he doesn't have a hidden agenda. And he speaks good stuff, and not evil stuff.

And, they just couldn't get their heads around that, could they? Let's go back outside, and see how Peter's getting on.

Jesus is going to get sent on to a more formal hearing, to Annas' son-in-law, but meanwhile, outside, Simon Peter stands warming himself.

[37 : 27] And somebody else asks him, you do have a northern accent, your face does look familiar, you're not one of his disciples, are you?

To which Peter, having started off saying no, sort of finds he can't really get out of it now. No, he says, no I'm not. Now John's very kind to Peter, because in the other gospels, it says he called down curses on himself, and made a real song and dance about it.

But here, John just records him saying, no I'm not. Then one of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man, whose ear Peter had cut off, said to him, didn't I see you with him, in the garden, in the olive grove?

And, again, Peter denied it. This is no, number three. And at that moment, a cock crows. As you know, Jesus had prophesied to Peter.

Peter had said, chapter 13, verse 37, he said, I'll lay down my life for you, says Peter. And Jesus said, will you really lay down your life for me?

[38 : 42] I tell you the truth, before the cock crows, you'll disown me three times. And that's exactly what happened. I feel very sorry for Peter. Peter. But we have this contrast, that while Jesus patiently and bravely keeps his commitment, Peter, three times, under the duress of being asked by a servant girl, and some people standing around a fire, says three times, he won't, he doesn't know Jesus.

And 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 11, there's a list of things that Jesus will and won't do. And one of them, it says, if we deny him, he will deny us.

Which is only fair. If we deny him, he will deny us. If we, I think it's, the translation says, 2 Peter, no, 2 Timothy.

2 Timothy, chapter 2. Here's a trustworthy saying, if we died with him, we also will live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

[40 : 01] It raises an issue, doesn't it? Because Peter has disowned Jesus three times. And Jesus would be quite within his rights to say, three times Peter, you disown me.

So that's it for you. I want to tell you that, going on to the end of the story, that's not what happened. But, Jesus went and spoke to Peter deliberately, and, reassured him, that he would be forgiven, even for that.

There was forgiveness, even for Peter. And I think we can take encouragement, that if Peter could be forgiven for that, the Lord, is full of forgiveness for us, if we turn back to him, if we say, Lord, I got things terribly, terribly wrong.

You know, there is a way back to God, from the dark paths of sin. Jesus isn't looking for spiritual athletes, he's willing to accept people, who have stumbled, and fallen, and made a right mess of things, but who come back to him, and ask for forgiveness.

That's what he went to the cross for. Here's the story that we've been looking at. It's a story of human sin. It shows up envy, the envy of the Jewish leadership, it shows up cruelty, it shows up hatred.

[41 : 40] It shows up the sin of, somebody like Peter, who overestimated himself. Said, Lord, even if everybody else, forsakes you, I won't, I'm a lot better than those people.

Actually, we're all, much of a muchness, spiritually, in that sense. And then, poor old Peter's cowardice. It's a story of God's goodness, that this is, all pre-planned.

It's happening as, Jesus knew it would, as the Father said it should, and as the Father had prepared. And as we see the story, it's executed, on the part of, our Saviour, with great courage, and steadfastness.

There's a huge amount to admire, and respect about Jesus, isn't there? In the way that he copes with all this. And for Jesus himself, we see, as each step unfolds, that it's, a pathway of, personal, sacrifice.

And actually, personal sacrifice, in the extreme. Each step, takes him, a little bit closer, to drinking that cup, which the Father's given him.

[43 : 02] This is the story, of Jesus, going to the cross. This is the story, of our redemption. Here might I 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.

And is this the story, that your life is built on?