

Jesus Died For Us

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[0 : 00] For many years now, a team of us from churches in Clevedon, once a year, go into the school, the secondary school, and engage in a series of lessons in the RS department with the Year Sevens as an introduction to the basics of what Christians believe.

And a big part of those lessons is we give them the opportunity to ask us any questions that they want to ask us. This year, we've been able to go back in for the first time in a couple of years because COVID basically meant we weren't able to do it.

So since January, we've been going in again and we've got one more lesson to go this month. But it's been an absolute delight to go and re-engage with the Year Sevens once again in that way.

Only this year, we've made those lessons slightly different in that we've made the lessons completely questions. So we go in for 100 minutes. That's how long a lesson is at the moment. 100 minute lessons. And they bombard us with as many questions as they want. It's great fun. One question that we frequently, frequently get asked, and I say this as an observation that goes back over all of the time that we've been doing this.

[1 : 28] One of the questions that we frequently get asked, and it's a question that gets asked not just by Year Sevens in a school, but by people of all different ages throughout the world, is this. In a world in which there's so many different religions, what makes Christianity so special?

Why should Christianity be true and right? Why should we believe in that when there are so many other claims to truth from other religious perspectives?

Good question. And it's a big question. There's loads of different things we could say in response to that, but I always like to say this.

All religions could be wrong. They cannot all be right.

All religions can be wrong because logically the possibility exists that all of us could be wrong. It could be that there is no God.

[2 : 43] And we could all be wrong. Now, obviously, I don't believe that we are. But it exists as a logical possibility.

But what cannot be a logical possibility is that we're all right. And the reason for that is that different religions, different faiths, have very radically different things to say about God.

Different faith claims, different faith groups claim different things about the nature of God, what God is like, who God is, and how God has revealed himself.

And no more so is this true when it comes to the one thing. There are many things, but there is one very particular thing that is unique to Christianity.

And that is the cross. Some 2,000 years on from the cross event, we have become so familiarised with it.

[3 : 53] I mean, every single one of us in this room, whatever our age and whatever our background, would have grown up in a world that for centuries preceding our existence would have known about the cross.

As such, we see crosses everywhere. Not just on churches, but on people's earrings, around people's necks, everywhere. All over the place. And we see not just the empty cross, but we see the crucifixion depicted.

We see it in art. We see it in stained glass windows. We see it in film. We see it everywhere. And in our familiarity, we lose sight of just how radical and controversial and grotesque that image is.

It strikes me as compelling that Christianity must be true because you'd never try and make it up. If you were trying to convince people in the first century that what you believed about Jesus Christ was real, you wouldn't make any of that stuff up.

Because it claims that in Jesus, God has died. And not just died, but died in the most hideous and grotesque way.

[5 : 04] The cross is an object of scorn, of ridicule, of shame. It's grotesque. And yet it has survived some 2,000 years later because it tells the story that lies at the very heart of the Christian understanding of God.

That God enters death. And it is that claim that engages and rejects all of those reasons that people would put forward not to believe in God.

Because the God that we see in Jesus Christ on the cross is unique. Let me share with you an image that we also often use in school.

And in fact, I think we may have used here before. It's a trick. It's a chemical trick. I don't actually know how it works. But this is some water.

And I'm going to pour some water into the glass. As you can see, it's clear. It's clean. It's pure water.

[6 : 16] You know, over these few weeks, as we're following what is called the four-point gospel, we're following four key points about the Christian message.

The first point is that God loves us. God loves you. And when you look at this clear water, it's there as a symbol to remind us that although we live in a world in which there's suffering, that's not what God wants.

God loves you and wants the very best for you. God creates us with the desire that we live a life that is clear and pure and perfect, in which there is no death and no suffering.

That, the Bible says, is what God wants for each and every person in history. And yet, of course, reality is not like that. Why?

Well, because a central part of God's love for us is that he gives us this thing called freedom, including the freedom to do what is wrong.

[7 : 26] And so, very early on in the book of Genesis, in the biblical narrative, we're given this story of how Adam and Eve reject God.

They choose wrong over right. Why? Because God gifts them with that thing that makes us distinctively human, the freedom to choose.

Without freedom, we wouldn't be loved. And it is because God loves us that he gives us freedom. This stuff here is iodine.

And if I pour it into this water, you'll see what happens. Suddenly, not quite so clean and pure again. Now, the very old-fashioned word that is used in the Bible to describe that is sin. But the stuff, the consequence of our God-given freedom, because God loves us, means that, and this is the second point in that four-point gospel, we've all done something wrong.

[8 : 34] We need forgiveness. And we don't have to look very far at any point, in any place, at any time in history to see the results of when we use and abuse our God-given freedom.

Of course, we see the most horrific images on our screens right now in Ukraine. But you don't have to go anywhere near that far to see and be reminded of the reality, the basic reality, that none of us is perfect.

Now, of course, we see some consequences have much bigger gravity and much greater scale in terms of their evil and their impact on human lives. But nobody can claim to be perfect.

That's the mess in which we live. And there are different ways in which we can try to do something about it. Every human being knows that sense that things are not quite right, and we respond to that reality in different ways.

Perhaps one of the most basic ways is kindness. And it's no accident that when you see the most horrific things happen in the world, you also see the best come out in human beings.

[9 : 44] When people come to the help of others. Why? Because that is a reflection of the love of God that is in us, because God has created us, even though there is so much mess. And so we see at times, always, when there is trouble going on, and that's always acts of human kindness.

And we may think that perhaps through our kindness, through our giving, whether that means giving of our money, giving of our time, giving of our energy, whatever, is the right thing to do, and of course it's the right thing to do.

But in and of itself, it doesn't get rid of the damage. It mitigates.

It's right that we do it. But it doesn't ultimately change it, which is why history has always presented the same realities of suffering and pain.

Another way in which we might choose to respond, and we see this at every stage in human history and in every culture, is with religion.

[11:00] And perhaps, you know, we appeal to our religious, our spiritual instincts, to try to put things right. We go to places of worship.

We perhaps become institutionally religious, or DIY religion, spirituality, whatever it may be. However we try to express it, and again, it's good to express it.

But, it doesn't change the mess. And indeed, all of us know the painful tragedy, that very often, it is religion that is at the very cause of the world's problems.

Religion is human beings striving to reach out for God or for something spiritual. But ultimately, we're still broken.

We're still in a mess. Only in Jesus Christ do we have hope.

[12:03] Because only in Jesus Christ do we see God revealed in a way that is unique, and that challenges every single religious instinct in us. Because it tells of God, who is the rescuer God, who is relentless in his mission to come to us, knowing that there is nothing that we can do to save ourselves.

August the 5th, 2010, San Jose Mine in Chile. The mine collapsed. 33 men were trapped in that mine. Two and a half kilometres from the entrance to the mine, and 700 metres below surface. They were in that place for 69 days. After some time, when it was thought that those men were going to die, they managed to make contact.

By boring a hole from the surface to the place below ground, some 700 metres, where those men were trapped.

I'm sure you remember the story. The world watched with bated breath, as eventually they bored a hole that was wide enough, 700 metres, remember, that was wide enough to fit a purpose-built capsule down to bring them back to safety.

[13:32] But in order for that to happen, that capsule had to be lowered from the place of safety with one person in it. That person got inside that capsule knowing that in the journey from the place of safety to the place of great danger down below, they could get stuck at any time, and their fate could be precisely the same as those that were down there.

And yet one person did. They got inside the capsule, and they were lowered down. And one by one, and this was in mid-October by this time, each of those 33 men were brought back to safety.

Any analogy breaks down eventually, but I find it a very helpful one. You see, we live in this world in which we cannot pull ourselves out of the brokenness.

Only God can do that, because only God is perfect and eternal, and only God is God. And in Jesus Christ, when God goes to the cross, God is lowered down to where we are.

When Jesus dies on the cross, something unique, supernatural, and history-changing happens.

[14:54] Because when Jesus dies on that cross, so God is in that death. death. And as Jesus dies on that cross, all the mess, everything that is wrong with the world, with you, and with me, is taken up and absorbed by him, so that he goes to the place of death that is ours, and out the other side.

What it is to actually be dead, none of us know, because we haven't been there yet. But because Jesus has gone on the cross for us, we can be confident that as he has been raised, he has been there, through there, and out the other side, because he is the rescuer God.

That is why in the Psalms we read, David say, even before this has happened, that it was revealed to him, even if I make my bed in Hades, in the world of the dead, you are there.

That is why Paul is able to say confidently in Romans, that there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God, even in death. Because God, in Christ, on the cross, goes there, ahead of us.

That changes everything. So in just a moment, we're going to pray.

[16:38] And in the prayer, I'm going to ask God to remind us once again of the power of his cross. It may be that you've listened to this, this morning, and for the first time in your life, it suddenly slotted into place.

And if that's you, the first prayer is particularly for you. And I invite you, if you've never done this before, this morning to give your life to Christ.

I suspect that there are I suspect that there are many of us that have heard this message over and over again and would have would have made a commitment we might even be able to put the time

and date on it, possibly decades ago.

And yet, somehow, just long to encounter and to be reminded of that truth in our lives once again. And if that's you, I want to encourage you to say that, you know, the message of the cross is not just a, it is a once and for all thing, but it's something that we need to be reminded of daily, time and time again.

You see, in the New Testament, there are two particular terms that we come over, come across, time and time again. One is that as Christians, we are in Christ.

[18 : 00] The other term is that as Christians, Christ is in you. So if you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you are in Christ, but Christ is in you.

Somebody said years ago that to be in Christ makes you fit for all eternity. To have Christ in you makes you fit for your time here on earth.

And therefore, it is a daily reality and a daily prayer that we need to be reminded and to draw on that strength that is the power of the cross. The same power that defeated death on the cross and that raised Jesus from the dead.

That is the power that lives in you. And so, of the two prayers that I'm going to pray in just a moment, that second prayer is particularly for you to join in if you just want more of that in whatever it is that you're facing right now.

Let's pray together. this is the first prayer and it's especially for anybody who wishes to make a response for the first time to accept the message of the cross of Jesus.

[19 : 23] Here's the prayer. Lord God, thank you that you love me enough to give me freedom.

Freedom to choose right from wrong. Lord, this day I want to choose what is right and I want to choose you.

thank you that you came to save me on the cross to save me from death and to set me free to live life to the full now on earth and for all eternity.

I give my life to you this day. Amen. If you prayed that prayer just now please afterwards come and speak to one of us.

Here's the second prayer. Lord Jesus, I've been following you for many years and you know what my life looks like right now.

[20 : 38] The challenges I face, the things that make me happy and the things that terrify me, the things that bring me joy and hope and the things that make me feel afraid or worried.

You know the struggles that are part of my reality. Thank you God that in Jesus you know what it is to feel pain and struggle.

Thank you for the power of the cross and the resurrection. Lord, may I know that power in my life now right in the midst of all of those things and may I know that power and grow in that power today, tomorrow and in the time to come.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. And I know thatatch is going to be coming to breath.

[21 : 56] Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.