

Jesus Predicts His Death

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Jesus Christ is simply the most amazing person to have ever lived. It's no wonder that more than two billion people ungrowingly follow and worship him and call themselves Christians.

! It's no surprise that Christianity is growing all over the world, and even in nations where other religions predominate, religions which hate Christianity and ruthlessly persecute Christians. There are many reasons why I say that Jesus is the most amazing person to have ever lived, and our passage here in Luke 18, 31 through 34, is one such reason, or should I say, contains four such reasons.

You see, we cannot understand this passage without joining with the world's two billion Christians in worshipping Jesus as Lord.

There are only four verses here, but if this was all we had of the New Testament, it would be enough to be Christian.

[1 : 11] In our passage, Jesus predicts not just his execution, but his resurrection from the dead. However, the more carefully we read, the more amazing Jesus becomes before our eyes.

There are depths here which form the entire foundation of the Christian faith. There are four themes running through this passage. Title, suffering, victory, and salvation.

As together this morning we join in the study of these verses, be prepared to join in following and in worshipping the Jesus two billion Christians today find to be the most amazing person to have ever lived.

Title, first of all, title. Jesus, having drawn around him the twelve disciples, his closest friends, wants to tell them something important.

If you had something important to say, you'd probably do the same thing. You'd tell your friends before you told anyone else. Jesus, see, we are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.

[2 : 27] Jesus draws his twelve disciples to the writings of the prophets of the Old Testament. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Anne read us from Jeremiah earlier. Although these prophets lived 600 years before the birth of Jesus, they foretold many things about him.

In the next few weeks as Jesus enters into Jerusalem, suffers, dies, and rises from the dead, Jesus will fulfill all their prophecies.

Supposing someone in the year 1425 predicted what I would be and what I would do in the year 2025, you'd have to conclude that I was a very special person.

But in 1425, nobody knew anything about me. But 600 years before Jesus was born, the prophets wrote about who he would be and what he would do.

[3 : 30] From this we must conclude how special Jesus was. Jesus himself said of the Old Testament, these are the scriptures which testify about me.

However, what I want to draw your attention to is the name and title Jesus gives himself, the Son of Man. The Son of Man.

This was actually Jesus' favorite name for himself. Now, historically, Christian scholars have drawn a contrast between Jesus as the Son of Man and Jesus as the Son of God.

They suggested that when Jesus calls himself the Son of God, he's referring to his divinity, his being God. But when Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, he's referring to his humanity, his being human.

However, this contrast is almost certainly false. Whereas our discussions on Jesus as the Son of God can wait for another time, Jesus' nickname for himself, the Son of Man, is highly significant in this passage.

[4 : 38] He is drawing upon a reference to him in one of the Old Testament prophets, the prophet Daniel. In Daniel chapter 7, the prophet was given a heavenly vision by God.

Let me read it to you. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man. And he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him. And to him, the Son of Man, was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, one that shall never be destroyed.

Far from being a title designed to emphasize Jesus' lowness, the Son of Man is a title designed to emphasize Jesus' highness.

A title designed to highlight the glory, the majesty, and the dignity of Christ.

[5 : 48] This makes this passage all the more remarkable. For who will it be who is mocked, shamefully treated, spat upon, and killed?

Who is he but the glorious Son of Man who has come from God the Father? The greatest shall become the least, and the most majestic shall become the most miserable.

The sovereign shall become the sufferer, and Jesus, the glorious Son of Man of Daniel 7, shall die. If Jesus was just like any other human being, while being shocked, we would not be surprised at the rejection, suffering, and death of Jesus.

But Jesus was the glorious Son of Man, so was unlike any other human being, which makes his rejection, suffering, and death so utterly unique.

How deep he stooped down. The apostle Paul would later say of Jesus, being in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be held on to, but he made himself nothing.

[7 : 05] Having drawn round him his closest friends, Jesus tells them that he, the Son of Man, will suffer and die. The greatest for the lowest.

Jesus is the most amazing man to have ever lived, not just because of who he was, the glorious Son of Man, sent from the Father in heaven, but because of how low he stooped down into the experience of our human suffering, and lower still into the experience of crucifixion.

Were this all we knew about him, it would be more than enough for us to join with the world's two billion Christians in following and worshipping him.

Title. Second. Suffering. Suffering. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spat upon, and after flogging him, they will kill him.

We have already spoken about the glory of Jesus' title as the divine Son of Man. We have alluded to the depths to which Jesus descended. And now Jesus details those depths.

[8 : 19] Depths to which it was criminal for any man to have descended. Never mind the glorious Son of Man. Depths to which it was criminal for any man to have descended from the Gentiles.

To be delivered over to the Gentiles is Jesus' way of saying that he will be betrayed to the Romans. Delivered over can also be translated as betrayed. He's predicting he will be betrayed.

That the Jews for whom he had come will deliver him over to the hated Gentiles. The Jewish Messiah will be shamefully betrayed. Now, bear in mind that Jesus has called around himself his twelve disciples, his closest friends.

One of them, Judas Iscariot, will be the means through whom Jesus will be arrested. Of all people, one of the twelve gathered around Jesus that day will betray him.

Now, Judas heard Jesus' words here, which makes the betrayal of his master all the more tragic. He will betray and hand Jesus over to the unclean Romans.

[9 : 29] Have you ever been betrayed? They say, you know, sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never harm me. They say it, but it's not true.

One of the deepest sufferings a person can endure is betrayal by their friends. How deeply Jesus' heart must have been grieved by Judas' betrayal. And then, when the Jewish leadership delivered him over to the Romans, how his spirit must have sunk within him.

The Jews were the very people God had loved, rescued from their slavery in Egypt and captivity from Babylon. The people to whom he had given Jerusalem, those whom he had loved, but they betrayed him to the pagan Romans.

And the Gentiles, the Romans, they mocked him. They treated him shamefully. They spat on him. They flogged him. They tortured him.

They humiliated him. The glorious Son of Man who rode on the clouds of the heavens. Rather than hearing the sound of the angels' praises, the sound of mockery and joking sounded in Jesus' ears.

[10:38] Rather than worshipping him, they treated him shamefully, insulting him. They drove a crown of thorns into his head. They were spitting upon him. Their spit ran down his face.

The face from which had shone the glory of God now covered in the spittle of the Roman soldiers. Then they flogged him. They scourged him with bone-filled whips which skinned Jesus' back and lacerated his muscles.

How deeply he suffered. How great Jesus as the Son of Man. The Daniel 7 image of all the dominion and glory and authority he has been given.

Then there he is now. He's a broken man. He has spittle and blood running down his face. And his back is a network of scars. And then they killed him.

Their bloodlust was such they took it out on him. They forced him to carry his own cross. And when he buckled under its weight, they bullied Simon of Cyrene to carry it in his place.

[11:44] And when they reached that hill called Golgotha, they crucified him. They killed him. They eliminated the threat he presented by executing him in the most demonic of ways.

Having delivered Jesus over to the Gentiles, the Jews thought they were washing their hands of him. But they were the ones who cried out, crucify him. They were the ones who betrayed him. And they were the ones who were ultimately held accountable by God for Jesus' death. How greatly Jesus suffered. How low he stooped down. In Psalm 40, we read of a man who finds himself in a pit of destruction, in a miry bog.

That's how low. And lower still, the great and glorious Son of Man will descend. What strikes me, at least, is when Jesus predicts these things here in Luke chapter 18, he knows it's all going to happen.

But he doesn't run away. He continues to set his face toward Jerusalem and that painful destiny. Very soon, Jesus will see in the distance the hill of Golgotha in which he will die.

[12:57] But still, he goes up to Jerusalem. And again, I say, where this all we knew about Jesus, his glory and his suffering, it would be more than enough for us to join with the world's two billion Christians in following and worshipping him.

But then thirdly, victory, victory. Everything so far seems so dark, so filled with gloom.

The darkness of mockery and suffering and dying leaves little room for any kind of light. Perhaps this is behind the title of the section in our Bibles, Jesus foretells his death a third time.

But the ultimate reality of this passage isn't defeat and it's not death. It is victory. Because Jesus says, on the third day he will rise.

Perhaps it would be better to entitle this section, Jesus predicts his resurrection. Because the ultimate reality of this passage is life, not death.

[14:04] The resurrection of Jesus was predicted by the Old Testament prophets, very much part of the Old Testament view of the Jewish Messiah.

For example, in Psalm 22, after the sufferings of the Messiah, of which we sang in that last Psalm, after that comes how he shall tell God's name to his brothers in the midst of the peoples of God, he shall praise him.

The end of Jesus' life by the death of the cross shall not be the end at all, but the beginning of his new, risen, glorious life.

In Luke 11, verse 30 onwards, Jesus compares his mission to that of Jonah, the Old Testament prophet. Talks of the sign of Jonah. Remember how the prophet was three days in the belly of that great fish.

So, Jesus' statement here doesn't come out of nowhere. For the student of the Old Testament and the careful listener to the previous words of Jesus, his words here should be not surprising at all.

[15:11] For his own reasons, God kept this knowledge from the disciples, but in hindsight, we see Jesus' great wisdom here. He knew he would suffer, he knew he would die, but he also knew that on the third day he would rise again.

The Jews handed him over to the Gentiles. They thought that by putting him to death, they had forever silenced Jesus and put an end to his messianic claims. Their legalism had defeated his love, their greed had defeated his grace.

When Jesus breathed his last, they rejoiced and they thought it was all over. In the grave of Jesus lay not just the body of our Lord, but the hope of his messiahship.

Surely the hymn is correct. Low in the grave he lay. But the cross was not ultimate, and his death was not the end.

And in the words of Psalm 16, a psalm we love to sing to the tune Golden Hill, God did not abandon his soul to the grave. On the third day after his death by crucifixion, Jesus burst forth from the tomb. [16:21] He triumphed over death, was victorious over the grave. All the malice of the Jew and Gentile toward him was overwhelmed by the never-dying love and resurrection power of our Lord.

Lord, Jesus' prediction here doesn't end in defeat, but in victory. We may be filled with apprehension, sorrow when we read of Jesus' suffering, but we're also filled with hope and joy as we read of his resurrection.

The resurrection is the triumph of our Lord over all the violence, the hatred, and the greed of mankind. We're so used to talking about the resurrection that we take it for granted, but it was utterly unique.

Think of the power and glory involved the angels gathered in heaven to meet Jesus as he returned to them in triumph. The light destroyed the darkness of the tomb, and death was forever defeated. And again I say, were this all we knew about Jesus, his glory, his suffering, and his resurrection. It would be more than enough for us to join with the world's two billion Christians in following and worshiping Jesus.

[17:43] But then lastly, salvation, salvation. If you've been with us for a while, you'll know that this passage is set in a section of Luke's gospel which discusses the issue of what it means to be right with God.

What it means to be right with God. So the tax collector, not the Pharisee, was right with God. Citizens of the kingdom of God must receive it like children.

The rich young ruler for all his wealth left Jesus empty and unrighteous. The blind beggar, as we'll see next week, or in two weeks' time, was healed because he cried out to Jesus for mercy. Zacchaeus, the tax collector who had been lost, was found by Jesus. The whole section resolves down into the question of what it means to be right with God.

How can a person get right with God? And what kind of people are right with God? Added to this is another aspect of the significance of Jesus' title, the Son of Man.

[18:58] The Son of Man. I'm quoting from a famous 19th century free church professor, George Smeaton, who wrote these words, The expression Son of Man alludes to vicarious punishment.

The expression Son of Man alludes to vicarious punishment. Studying all the passages where the words Son of Man is used, Professor Smeaton concluded it's always used in the context of what he calls vicarious punishment.

Now, Victorians loved big words. Mr. Coleridge, who was pre-Victorian, he loved big words, many of which I don't understand, but Smeaton loved big words as well, and vicarious was one of their favorites.

Simply put, the word vicarious means on behalf of someone else, on behalf of someone else. You've heard the word vicar, right? You know, a vicar? On behalf of someone else.

So, vicarious punishment merely means to be punished on behalf of someone else. When Jesus uses the title Son of Man, he is always alluding to how he will be punished on behalf of others.

[20:21] If we take that finding into our passage here in Luke 18 with all its talk of Jesus suffering and dying, we conclude the following. Jesus was delivered over to the Gentiles, spat upon, mocked, flogged, and killed to bear the punishment others deserve.

Jesus suffered bearing the punishment others deserve. So, the tax collector of the temple, he deserved to be punished on account of his sinful way of life, but Jesus was punished in his place on the cross.

Zacchaeus deserved to be punished on account of his greed and deceit, but Jesus was punished in his place. We begin to see how the teaching of this passage in Luke 18 is central to the Christian doctrine of salvation and why it is therefore that Jesus, the Son of Man, is so amazing.

He descended from the heights of his Father's majesty on high, stooping down to the depths of human misery and suffering on behalf of sinful, helpless, and blind human beings.

He was suffering and dying not for crimes he had committed, but for crimes we had done and for the sinful people we had been. This is what it means for Jesus to be the loving Son of Man.

[21:49] This is how we can become right with God. Becoming right with God was a matter of obeying the law. The rich young ruler from last week would be the prime candidate for righteousness, but he left Jesus sad.

If becoming right with God was a matter of religious devotion, the Pharisee praying in the temple would have been another prime candidate for righteousness, but he left the temple that day unjustified.

Becoming right with God consists in this. Calling out to him for his grace and his mercy. And in doing so, God will apply all the merits of the sufferings and death and resurrection of Christ to us. You see, Jesus was suffering, dying and rising not for his own benefit, but for our benefit so that through faith in him our sins may be done away with and we may become right with God. It is not our efforts which make us right with God. It is not our religious devotion. It is not our achievements or our societal status. It is simple faith in the Christ who died on the cross.

[23 : 01] And that's it. To be right with God is not the preserve of the religious and the rich. It is open to anyone who will call upon God for mercy and put his faith in Jesus.

It's open to tax collectors. It's open to helpless children to dispossessed disciples, to the physically and mentally challenged, to the poor. It is open to sinners. It's open to outsiders.

It's open to the common man on the street like me. The disciples didn't understand these things at the time. But after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, they became the world's most enthusiastic preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They wrote letter after letter containing the firm teaching of Jesus suffering and dying on our behalf. Peter, the apostle who was there that day when Jesus spoke these very words in Luke 18, he later wrote, Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous, Jesus, for the unrighteous, me, that he might bring us to God.

The apostle John, who was also there that day, he wrote this, and this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

[24 : 21] In Jesus' death, we who have faith in him have life. In the cross of Christ, we who have faith in him are forgiven and made right with God.

Other religions may hate the good news of the Christian gospel, mainly because as human beings, we want to earn salvation for ourselves rather than trusting in God to provide it for us, that we who have believed in Jesus cannot but stand in amazement before him, praising him for all that he's done for us as the Son of Man.

Without doubt, Jesus is simply the most amazing and remarkable man to have ever lived, and yet that's not quite correct, is it? For we cannot only look back on the life of Jesus, but because he rose on the third day, we can confidently say he is alive today.

The glorious Son of Man who stooped so low, who suffered and died for us today, through his word, beckons, invites, and commands us to abandon our own efforts to get right with God and to put our faith and trust in him instead.

Are you willing today to look to the most amazing and remarkable man, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man? Are you willing to look to him and trust him for your salvation from sin and guilt, fear and despair, the Christ who suffered, died, and rose for sinners and the helpless and the blind?

[26 : 05] Are you willing to join with the world's two billion Christians by following and worshiping him, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man?

Amen.