

Easter Friday

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Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're about to hear the story, the first-hand account of what happened. So will you please let me say just a few words to get us thinking before we hear the story.

This COVID crisis we're in, I think it's forced us all to re-evaluate what's essential in our lives. You're probably sick of that word essential, but I think it's making us all ask that question.

What is absolutely necessary for my life? When this was all starting, I went to Audi one night, and I didn't care too much that I couldn't get the vegetables I was after, but there was no coffee.

So I ordered some online. I don't know why I looked up then. I suppose God does provide all things, but I ordered some online. And as I excitedly opened the delivery, I was wondering if coffee was just a bit too essential for my own happiness.

When this card fell out of the package. Could have been an answer. I'm not sure. But the coffee was delicious.

[1 : 1 1] And that's the main point. We're all asking this question. What is essential at a public level? What are essential services that remain open? What are essential reasons that we're allowed to leave the house like exercise and acts of compassion?

But I reckon we're asking this question at a deeper level than this. I think we're asking the question. What is essential for our home life? What's essential for our relationships being sustained and growing through this time?

If we can't be in each other's presence, can't shake hands and hug, how do we express our connection? Being forced to isolate.

I wonder if you're like me and you're just growing in your appreciation for how connection is just so close to the heart of what gives us life.

So we're all asking this question. What's essential for life? The story we're about to hear gives a surprising answer to our question. What's absolutely essential for my life is that another man died.

[2 : 2 3] Jesus died to give us connection with God and connection with one another. So what we're going to do now is we're going to hear this story.

Simon will read what happened and I will point out a few things in the story as we go. And as I said, we're going to cross each time. We're going to hear the story in four parts.

And after each part, we'll hear from four people and how this story has changed and is changing their lives. So I hope you're looking forward to this. I invite you to listen and to reflect.

We pick up the story with Jesus having claimed that he is God's only son, the good shepherd who will lay down his life for his sheep.

He's been betrayed by his closest friends, arrested by his own Jewish people, those who should have recognized him.

[3 : 22] And he's now been handed over to the Roman governor, Pilate. So over to you, Simon, to read part one of the story. Okay. Okay.

John chapter 19. Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.

They came up to him saying, hail, king of the Jews and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, see, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.

So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, behold the man.

When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, crucify him, crucify him. Pilate said to them, take him yourselves and crucify him.

[4 : 35] For I find no guilt in him. The Jews answered him, we have a law. And according to that law, he ought to die because he has made himself the son of God.

When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, where are you from?

But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, you will not speak to me. Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?

Jesus answered him. You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, he who delivered me over to you has the greatest sin.

From then on, Pilate sought to release him. But the Jews cried out, if you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.

[5 : 46] So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called the stone pavement and in Aramaic, Gabbatha.

Now, it was the day of preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, behold your king.

And they cried out, away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said to them, shall I crucify your king?

The chief priests answered, we have no king but Caesar. So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. It was a very dangerous thing to claim to be a king and so stir people up to go against the authority of Rome.

That's a quick and sure way to be crucified. That's the kind of thing that Pilate, the governor representing Caesar, was to squash without mercy or hesitation.

[7 : 08] But that's why it's really surprising that three times Pilate says in different ways, I find no guilt in him. To try and satisfy the murderous cries of the Jewish authorities, he has Jesus beaten so that he can then release him.

Jesus is mocked, dressed in royal purple, which is the best colour by the way, and given a crown of thorns dug into his head, each soldier bowing before him, hail King of the Jews, and striking him.

But it's not enough. Only death would satisfy Jesus' own Jewish people. And only a public death, discrediting once and for all, all his claims to be God's son.

To be killed and hung on a tree was a sure sign of God's rejection of a person. The Jews won't be satisfied with anything less.

Pilate didn't care so much that Jesus was innocent. But he did care that the Jewish authorities were manipulating him to do their will. And they knew they had the upper hand.

[8 : 24] What would Caesar do if he heard Pilate didn't crucify someone claiming to be the king? Pilate didn't crucify someone claiming to be the king?

So easily. But Jesus was silent. Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified. But not without putting the Jews in their place first.

Okay, then, have what you want. This is the only king you Jews will ever have. So now watch him be crushed by the power of Rome. Behold your king. Pilate and the soldiers who beat him had no idea how true their words were.

Pilate and the soldiers who beat him had no idea how true their words were. Friends, behold your king. Innocent yet punished. Accused yet silent.

Having all authority yet submitting to death. chosen by God yet rejected by the world the question we're left with until the next part of the story is why why would he endure this but before we hear the next part we're going to first cross to Catherine and she's going to share how Jesus has really impacted her life so thank you Catherine okay when I was listening to this story to this reading one of the things that really struck me was how unjustly Jesus was accused and that he didn't do anything and I know for me that this was particularly striking because I really really really hate being unjustly accused and I not only don't want to

[10 : 55] I always want to be right but I always want to be seen to be right as well and if I am unjustly accused particularly by those closest to me particularly in marriage and at home the wheels fall off I react to really intensely massively defensive massively aggressive and lash out in a really destructive way and when I think about Jesus at this time he of all people not only has the right of being able to say I am right guys but also he has the power to be able to blitz these guys and smash them to smithereens and he doesn't he is silent when accused and he is calm when he responds he responds in a moderated calm way saying you only get this authority because God's given you this authority and it keeps reminding me that I have far less right to be seen as seen as right and in fact it doesn't matter it doesn't matter if those who are with me can see that I'm good or bad God knows that the heart stuff and it gives me a chance to step back and go all right how am I going to respond am I going to respond in a way that is displeasing to God hitting out at everybody around me or am I going to respond slowly kindly compassionately with patience looking at myself and seeing where the fault is so um I've been 40 years a Christian I can see how much I've changed in that 40 years um particularly under great trials and stress um I can see where I've uh not been what I've wanted to be but where over time things are changing and I hope that things will continue to change in fact I know that things will continue to change um God is working at me and he is really making a difference thanks Catherine we're going to pick up now um midway verse through verse 16 and continue our reading so they took Jesus and he went out bearing his own cross to the place called the place of the skull which in Aramaic is called Golgotha there they crucified him and with him two others one on either side and Jesus between them

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross it read Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews many of the Jews read this inscription for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city and it was written in Aramaic in Latin and in Greek so the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate do not write the king of the Jews but rather this man said I am king of the Jews Pilate answered what I have written I have written when the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and divided them into four parts one part for each soldier also his tunic but the tunic was seamless woven in one piece from top to bottom so they said to one another let us not tear it but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be this was to fulfill the scripture which says they divided my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots so the soldiers did these things but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister

Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby he said to his mother woman behold your son then he said to the disciple behold your mother and from that hour the disciple took her to his own home after this Jesus knowing that all was now finished said to fulfill the scripture I thirst a jar full of sour wine stood there so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth when Jesus had received the sour wine he said it is finished and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit Roman practice was to whip criminals before they are crucified with whips that have bits of bone and metal tearing at the flesh a crucified victim was stripped naked publicly put to shame with their crime displayed for all the world to see the victim is nailed through their hands or wrists and they are left there in the hot sun for hours sometimes days until eventually the victim is too tired to hold up their body weight to allow air into their lungs and they suffocate but the agony of Jesus isn't the focus in the story instead our attention is drawn to the soldiers gambling for Jesus' clothing unknowingly these executioners are acting to God's script written in Psalm 22 a thousand years earlier they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots

Jesus knew that his mission was almost complete so he cries out in thirst as God's word said it would happen and drinking sour wine clothes and drinking sour wine they just seem like random things to focus on don't they but there was nothing random going on and Jesus knew it and that's the point Jesus was fully aware that every step leading to his impending death was the design of his heavenly father and he obeyed every step of the way his last words are not words of a victim but words of triumph it is finished my mission is complete and he bows his head freely giving up his spirit no one took his life from him not Pilate not the Jews they're arguing over the crime written above him the king of the Jews which is written in three languages for all the Roman world to read and understand as Pilate and the Jews fight for authority over the situation unknowingly

God is using them to declare to the whole world that Jesus is God's king this is the father's plan for our king to die and our king was obedient to his father until his last breath it is finished we're going to hear now from Gareth who will share how he's come to rest in God's unexpected plan so thanks Gareth good morning all going back to my late teens I believe the real life was random that is I stopped believing that there was a God and I believed that the world came into being randomly by Big Bang or some other such thing when I really thought on that it terrified me because I recognised how short life is and that through that lens how utterly meaningless that terror stayed with me for quite some time until I could stand it no more and ask my father rather a lot of questions about his belief in God my memory of that conversation is very vague

[20 : 17] I remember thinking that dad's belief wasn't so silly after all I think he prayed at the end and I remember that I felt as if a massive burden had been removed from my shoulders much like that of Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress these days I look through a different lens I look at life through God's word the Bible and life makes a lot more sense and it has meaning the psalmist in Psalm 31 says I trust in you oh Lord I say you are my God my times are in your hand I believe that I too can trust in God and that my times are in his hand 15 years ago I was really unhappy with the job I was in I was starting early in the morning and finishing late not even able to attend an evening Bible study at the new church we were now attending so I prayed

Lord please help me with this not too long after that I was called into the boss's office and made redundant we're letting you go he said like I was some sort of fish I said very little but felt quite indignant about it how dare they I thought then I remembered my prayer and could see that God was in it and gave thanks even though it was unnerving to say the least within two weeks I received a phone call from someone saying that they had heard that I may be looking for work and would I consider working for them I said I would consider it and have been working for them ever since God had a more appropriate job for me with regular hours I know that I can really trust in God and my time really is in his hand because of Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross my life has meaning and hope thanks Gareth we'll continue our reading from verse 31 since it was the day of preparation and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath for that Sabbath was a high day the Jews asked

Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away so the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead they did not break his legs but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water he who saw it has borne witness his testimony is true and he knows that he is telling the truth that you also may believe for these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled not one of his bones will be broken and again another scripture says they will look on him whom they have pierced well Roman practice was to leave the corpse hanging on the cross for days for the vultures to eat but for the Jews this would be considered as

God's curse on the whole land and people to leave the body hanging and especially for this to happen on a Sabbath day at the start of the Passover festival a festival that celebrated cleansing from sin and freedom to live with God to leave the body hanging would just contaminate in Jewish thinking so they asked Pilate to break the legs of Jesus to speed up his death and take him away they come and break the two criminals legs either side but Jesus was already dead and to be sure a soldier pierces his side with his spear and John saw that it brought a sudden flow of blood and water we're not going to go into the details but medically it's kind of obvious he was definitely dead but there's a deeper significance here that John wants us to see in Jewish sacrifices both blood and water are both used to cleanse people from all their moral sin against God making them acceptable to live with him clean reconnected to him just as the

Passover lamb had to have no blemish and have no broken bones to be an acceptable sacrifice to God so we see Jesus the true lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world whose sin is taken away John tells us clearly he who saw all this happen with his own eyes has borne witness we have been listening to his testimony this morning and he's telling us this so that we also might believe as you picture the blood coming out of Jesus side do you believe that he did this willingly do you believe he did this for you then all you're wrong before God has been washed clean you can know without a doubt that God loves you

[26 : 30] John 3 16 says for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life well we're going to hear now from Marie and Marie is going to share how she has come to believe more deeply of God's love for her so thanks Marie hi I'm Marie and this is my family sorry in advance if they're a little bit noisy we've just totally rubbed them with chocolate so hopefully they'll be quiet for a moment yeah so I'm just going to share a little bit of my story so Pete and I we got we were high school sweethearts and we got married young and then a few years later we wanted to start our family and unfortunately then we were introduced to infertility and it was a really hard time for us we saw our friends and families having babies great joy and it just wasn't happening for us and the doctor said it was likely not to ever happen for us as well so we had over eight years of medical things and crying and praying and yeah it was a hard time and also a hard time testing me in my faith as a

Christian as well I had to keep rereading passages like we've been reading this morning and reminding myself that I actually was loved and I had to believe that I was loved so much that Jesus would die for me and for my sins so that actually helped even though things weren't going to my plans and as you can see we eventually were blessed with kids and now our daily struggle is learning to be a mum with three young kids while the pandemic's going on and I'm trying to be a kidney teacher as well and unfortunately I often get it wrong as a mum I lose my patience I get quick tempered sometimes but thank goodness I don't have to be weighed down by that I can keep on going because I've been cleansed through Jesus of all my sin and all my failures so not only have I been cleansed but God also promises to be there with me and to help me which is a great comfort as a mum especially during all these uncertain times going on in the world so yeah

I think that's just what I wanted to share with you guys that I've learned through my experiences some things can be hard and some things don't go to plans to your own plans but you can find love and great comfort in Jesus and you can be cleansed from all your sins and failures through him so yeah I'll get that out of story thank you for listening and kids do you guys want to say goodbye say bye bye thanks Marie and Pete we're just going to read the last part of the passage now from verse 38 after these things Joseph of Arimathea who was a disciple of Jesus but secretly for fear of the Jews asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus and Pilate gave him permission so he came and took away his body

Nicodemus also who earlier had come to Jesus by night came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes about 75 pounds in weight so they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices as is the burial custom of the Jews now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid so because of the Jewish day of preparation since the tomb was close at hand they laid Jesus there we're now final scene our attention is drawn to two very surprising people they're two men of high position among the Jewish leaders Joseph is described as a believer a follower but secretly because he feared the

Jewish authorities and you can see why and Nicodemus who was too afraid to come to Jesus in the daylight so he saw him secretly at night these men had a lot to lose their high position maybe even their lives if you were there seeing the corpse of Jesus hanging on the cross how risky would it be to admit before Pilate and the authorities that you believe that this man is worthy of honour I think we're being shown what believing in Jesus looks like it's believing that Jesus is worth risking everything else for it's not hiding but openly confessing it's not living in fear and darkness but walking in the light of his love they've richly prepared his body for burial so that the stench of death wouldn't be so bad and laid him in a tomb in which no one had yet been laid but even as they honour him they show that they don't quite grasp who

[32 : 57] Jesus is and what he came to do they were treating Jesus as if his story ended in the tomb if the story ended here we would have no reason to celebrate at Easter because death would yet again have the final say I don't think Joseph and Nicodemus would have bothered with spices and wrapping Jesus' body if they knew what was coming on Sunday morning the story doesn't end here and that is such good news for all who believe in him our story doesn't end in death either the cross is blood poured out to reconnect us to God and what followed on Sunday morning is absolutely essential for our life friends behold your king innocent and having all authority yet submitting to injustice and rejection and death obedient trusting his father's plan pouring out his blood for you to wash you clean for everyone who believes dying he destroyed the power of death to give us new and forever life what a king the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world good reason to celebrate well we're going to finish by hearing from

Alyssa as she shares how Jesus has washed her and given her new life so over to you Alyssa sorry I just wanted to share some of my story and how Jesus has and is still impacting my life so I grew up in a loving household we were taught about Jesus and his love and the forgiveness that he offers from a really young age however I don't think I ever really realised the weight of what that meant for myself personally until I was in my late teens so from a young age I fell into some forms of addiction and it became a source of comfort for me I always knew in my heart that there was a

God and I believed in him but I really struggled to feel his love and his grace for myself and it's only really been in the last few years that I've come to accept that love and forgiveness it was in those younger years however that I had formed some really unhealthy habits and ways of handling pain and emotions I don't feel I ever learnt to handle pain well and I experienced a lot of it and instead of turning to God to find my worth and identity I allowed the addiction and what it brought with it to define me things like shame feeling not worthy enough and being a failure I carried this identity with me and it only led me further into the path of addiction with every trial and pain that I faced as the years have gone on

I feel like I am letting go of the shame the feelings of not being worthy or of being a failure and finding my identity more and more in Jesus but I will be honest in saying it's been a really long hard and slow journey but the only way that's been made possible is coming to understand how wide and how deep and how great the love of Jesus is for me and what his forgiveness and grace really means it's a daily struggle and fight not to hold on to the past and allow what has happened to me or what I have done to define me and I still fall into the trap of thinking that other things can carry me through but every day I'm learning that if it wasn't for Jesus and his death and resurrection I would not have been made new I would not have been changed from the inside out nor have the strength to keep going you see the greatest comfort the greatest peace and the greatest hope I have is knowing

Jesus Christ and that he knew everything about me and even knowing everything about me he endured the cross and he died so that we could know him his love and his forgiveness Jesus Christ God himself who knew my sin my weakness my failing the king of the world humbled himself went through all that pain suffering rejection and humiliation thinking of you and me carrying the sin of the world he died on the cross and then rose again so we could be made new be holy perfect and blameless and also to give us the strength to persevere and fight temptation my king suffered in my place what a God what a hope we have what a king thanks for listening to my story yeah thank you so much

[38 : 54] Alyssa and Marie and Gareth and Catherine thank you for opening yourselves up to us to see inside your lives and your hearts thank you so much for sharing your stories with us it's been really encouraging um you so much thank you to see así some of rient and why thank you and I'll see you