

One Goal

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- [0 : 0 0] The readings are taken from 1 Corinthians 2, 2 and then Luke 9, 51. For I decided that while I was with you, I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified.
- And then Luke 9, 51. As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. On holiday in Wales a number of years ago, I knew that in the town of Newcastle, Emlyn, one of my heroes of the faith, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, was buried.
- A medical doctor who became a fine preacher at Westminster Chapel, packed out. But I didn't know where his grave was.
- It's a bit of an odd thing to do on holiday. But Martin Lloyd-Jones' book on preachers and preaching had been very influential in me hearing the call from an English teacher teaching about dead poets to a preacher preaching a living Christ.
- So I wanted to go and pay my respects. So I went into a bakery and bought something. Then I said to the Welsh lady behind the counter, Do you know where Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones is buried?
- [1 : 3 5] And it was as if I was in Sainsbury's and saying, Do you know where the cheese counter is? She said, Oh, yes, it's the main road out, second graveyard on the left, three rows in, four to the right.
- So she was absolutely right, parked the car, went second graveyard on the left. And there I found a very simple grave, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones.
- Now he was called the Good Doctor. The Good Doctor, that was his inscription. His dates. And then a verse of scripture.
- A preacher who could take four or five years to go through a letter to the Ephesians, wanted, or his family wanted, his life to be summed up with one verse, the verse that I've been asked to preach on this morning.
- And actually, I want to preach on one word this morning. Therefore, I resolved to know nothing while I was with you. And Paul was in Corinth, a very difficult city to be a Christian in.
- [3 : 0 6] And we read in the Acts of the Apostle, he was there about 18 months or so with Priscilla and Aquila, or Aquila and Priscilla. If you don't think women should be in leadership, you say Aquila and Priscilla.
- But then you have to actually reckon with other scriptures that put Priscilla's name first, as if she's the leader of the church as well as Aquila. And I think that's right.
- About 18 months he was there. He went to the synagogue and he announced that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. And that didn't go down very well eventually, because he's actually saying Jesus Christ fulfills all those Old Testament prophecies.
- that he is exactly who the Old Testament said would come. And the Jewish people are saying, well, the Romans haven't been kicked out, and the kingdom hasn't been established fully, and so he can't be the Messiah.

And anyway, he died in weakness and shame, so nobody who was the Messiah would die like that. So Paul left. He went next door.

[4 : 27] That's not a great way to start a church, to leave and actually set up next door is what he did. And for 18 months, I resolved to know nothing, he says, while I was with you, save Christ and him crucified.

And my simple one question this morning, leaving the other eight for another time maybe. Why crucified? What?

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, save Christ and him executed. That would do it. Save Christ and given a lethal injection.

Save Christ and given a firing squad. Save Christ and given a hangman's noose. Save Christ. Why crucify?

Crucifixion was the most disgusting way to be killed. It was so disgusting. No Roman citizen would talk about it, let alone be subject to that.

[5 : 41] It was a public, gruesome, horrible death. I'm actually not going to go into the physiological details of it. I couldn't go to, I didn't want to go to see Mel Gibson's film of a previous decade, The Passion of the Christ, where it was shown in all its graphic detail.

It feels like it would be watching a friend suffering. But that's what Paul says. I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, save Christ and him crucified.

A disgusting, subhuman, shameful, horrible way to die.

In our intercessions, we touched on those brutal places in the world today. And I would claim that what Paul is saying is in the horror of sin.

And I'm not talking about, should I give up chocolate cakes for Lent? Should I lose a couple of pounds? I mean sin. I mean Navalny. I mean Ukraine.

[7 : 04] I mean October the 7th in Israel. I mean Gaza. I mean Rafa. I mean the Congo. I mean sin.

I mean disgusting sin. Where the newsreader would say, viewers might find the following footage distressing.

Or after a particular news bulletin, you might want to find help on the BBC action line. Because what you've just seen is trauma.

And can Jesus speak to that? Yes, because Jesus was crucified. In fact in the creeds it says, he descended into hell.

And only a God who suffers can speak to us in our humanity, in our sin.

[8 : 05] In our church, we have some groups called life groups. Life groups, which is nice. There's a church not far from here in Annerley. Christ Church Annerley.

It's a great church. And they have a, not a life group, they have a lifer group. And really, unless you've done at least armed robbery and found Christ, you're not going to fit in there.

And I was at Christ Church Annerley a while ago for a men's breakfast. And my friend there was sitting by the door getting tickets and people coming in.

And one of the members of the lifer group, somebody who'd really done serious crime and done serious time, obviously felt he needed to go out for a cigarette. So my friend says to him, oh, don't worry, Jesus can deal with that.

And he said, yeah, yeah, he got me out of cocaine when I was inside. So I'm not talking about, should I give up sugar for that?

[9 : 18] Or I said something wrong about somebody and I'm sorry, I need to confess that. I'm talking about disgusting sin. I'm talking about shame.

I'm talking about those things that we can hardly face ourselves that we might have thought or done. I'm talking about addiction. I'm talking about the depths.

And Jesus can be our saviour because he's been there, because he's suffered, because he's gone through that horror. And only a God who suffers can stand with us.

I remember going to a medical appointment with a member, very intelligent professor of economics in our London universities.

And he was waiting to get a diagnosis. And he took his Bible with him and we sat in that shabby corridor in Hemel Hempstead Hospital.

[10 : 24] And I said, because he wanted me there, I said, do you want me to come in? He said, no, I'll be okay. And he went in and he got a death sentence. He got a death sentence from the consultant.

But I'll tell you this, those weeks and months that he had were rich weeks and months because he knew that Jesus was journeying with him.

Christ crucified, Christ who suffered, Christ. We were due to go to Jerusalem a few weeks ago on a pilgrimage and obviously we didn't go but we'd been there before and we visited something called Yad Vashem which is a kind of museum but to the Holocaust.

and it was overwhelming. But one room, I wasn't prepared for this, a large room, a sort of circular room and in that room was book upon book upon book upon book upon book book book with just a little name.

And there were millions of names of those who had died in the Holocaust. Millions of names.

[12 : 08] Unspeakable depravity and yet Christ crucified can speak in the presence of that evil.

Christ crucified. Why crucifixion? Why not just beheading? Why the shame?

Why becoming less than human? Why that depravity?

Because he loves us. Because he loves us. You may have had an easy life and God bless you. God loves you as much if you've had an easy life as if you've known some brokenness or challenges right now.

But my testimony would be of a very privileged life. And then things unraveled a few years ago. And at one point I needed I needed to actually say help.

[13 : 29] I need help. And so I went to a therapeutic community anticipating a month's stay. It was during lockdown so nobody would have known.

We left both cars in the drive. I just I was so ashamed as a Baptist pastor checking myself in. I was just so embarrassed.

It's come to this. Even one of the nursing staff said what are you doing here man of God? I said thank you very much. Well two weeks into the month the therapist asked if I could have a word.

And she said I think you should leave. You're not cooperating with the stuff. I mean seriously?

Seriously? Seriously? Where do I go now? Where do I go now? I've come for help and you're saying I'm a bit of a difficult person.

[14 : 35] I'm a client who's not cooperating. And on the night before I left I said where do I go now?

And it was as if the Holy Spirit came and said to me I've been waiting for this. I can't use my cleverness and my degrees or my training or stuff.

I've just been asked to leave a place that I needed to receive help from. And the Holy Spirit says I've been waiting for this. And by God's grace I I'm not whole.

I won't be whole until I get to heaven. I'm not going to tell you the very many thorns in the flesh. That's between me and the Lord. But Christ crucified meant that my lowest point was a point he could meet me at.

Christ crucified in my depths. Let me finish by affirming the ministry of Steve Chalk.

[16 : 01] And if you've ever worked for Steve Chalk then you know you're doing a great job is what he would say. Steve Chalk as a Baptist pastor got into big big trouble because of a book he wrote and he included this phrase.

The death of Jesus is cosmic child abuse. Steve's wrong on that.

Okay. I did tell him he was wrong once and obviously I was wrong. But the Bible says this.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. So who was crucified?

It was God who voluntarily out of love offered himself. It wasn't sinners in the hands of an angry God.

[17 : 07] It was the love of God, a moral God in a moral universe who himself sacrificed his life.

In the unspeakable evil of Auschwitz, a Catholic priest took the place of somebody who was going to be put in a starvation cell to die.

Maximilian Colbert gave himself voluntarily so another person would not have to die.

Nobody twisted his arm. Out of love and compassion he gave himself so there could be freedom.

He experienced the depth of depravity and a horrible death so somebody else could be free. Barabbas was spared because Jesus took his cross.

[18 : 27] Barabbas and I'm Barabbas and you're Barabbas for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you save Christ and him crucified.

Get to express us in light. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.