

GOOD FRIDAY - The King Dies a Sinner's Death

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Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] Well friends, while you remain standing, I'll pray. Lord God, please help us to understand your word today and please help us to live in the light of it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well friends, I am aware of the time today and I just want to accomplish a few things. Three or four. First, I want to give you an overview of what happens from the end of Mark chapter 14 through to the death of Jesus in the middle of chapter 15.

Second, I want to tell you a little bit about Roman crucifixion because if you understand it, you'll understand a bit about what is happening on the cross. Third, I want to ask a question that I think screams out in silence from the passage.

And finally, I want to propose an answer to that particular question. So let's get started with my quick overview. I want you to look with me in your passage at chapter 14 verses 53 to 72.

In chapter 11, you might remember Jesus arrived and was welcomed into Jerusalem. He opposed the religious leaders of his day. He confronted their evil and the corruption that was present in their temple.

[1 : 14] And as he had set himself against them, so they retaliated and set themselves against him. They colluded with Judas who betrayed him.

And now in verses 53 to 64, Jesus is led before the high priest. He finds himself in the midst of a religious council called the Sanhedrin. They're clearly not satisfied with just an arrest and a flogging. They want this man's death. They want him dead and they want him disgraced before the crowds. So charges are brought with an inaccurate representation of what Jesus had actually said.

Just like the servant of Isaiah 53, Jesus is silent before his accusers. He's condemned. He is then mocked as a false prophet in verse 65. And then in fulfillment of the prophecy he had offered just a day or two beforehand, and Peter denies him three times.

With this, we move to the events of the day that we remember today on Good Friday. In verse one, they hand Jesus over to the civil authorities. Charges are relayed to Pilate.

[2 : 23] Again, Jesus either answers enigmatically or remains silent before them. Pilate recognizes the motivations of those who have brought him the religious authorities. For their part, they so want Jesus dead that they allow a murderer to be released in his place.

One set of murderers, in other words, orchestrates the release of another murderer. They then arrange for one who is guilty of insurrection to be released instead of one who is guilty of no insurrection.

In verses 16 to 20, the second mockery of Jesus occurs. Now he's mocked, not as a prophet, but as a king, the king of the Jews.

He's then led out to crucifixion. Simon is conscripted to carry his cross. And in verse 15, Jesus arrives at Golgotha, the place of the skull.

Now in verses 23 to 33, we hear about the crucifixion. And this is where I'd like to spend just a moment or two telling you about crucifixion in the Roman and ancient world. Crucifixion was practiced by many nations in the ancient world.

[3 : 30] There were various forms of it. For example, in some forms, the victim was crucified alive. In other forms, crucifixion was used not so much to kill a person, but to display a person who might have been executed earlier in a different fashion.

The aim of both forms of crucifixion was exactly the same. It was to make sure that the victim, whoever they were, was subjected to the utmost indignity and utmost disgrace.

To make that clear, the victim was often totally naked. And when the victim was a living victim on the cross, dying on the cross, crucifixion was a punishment in which the executioners were given full reign before the actual event.

Their caprice was often enormously high. So was their sadism. It was therefore considered to be a punishment, an execution which was utterly barbaric.

Any death was better than this death. The Romans were unanimous. Crucifixion was a horrific, disgusting, degrading, brutal business.

[4 : 47] You did not talk about it in cultural circles. You know, you didn't talk about it around the dinner table. Most people considered it was a necessary evil, a deterrent from such, you know, to avoid criminality and so on.

Therefore, a blind eye was turned to its use by rulers, often who had a lust for revenge and a hunger for cruelty. And in verses 23 to 27, a degrading, cruel, and revengeful punishment is carried out on this innocent man.

He has been mocked in religious courts as a prophet. He has been mocked in civil courts as a king. And now, as he hangs dying, he is mocked again by passers-by and fellow prisoners as a saviour, a messiah and a king.

And of course, although these mockings are incredibly cruel and they have a sting, each of them is ironically true. You see, the man dying is a prophet.

He is a king. He is the king of Israel. He will be the king of all the earth. He is the messiah. And as a true messiah, he will protect the temple by replacing it.

[6 : 06] As a true messiah, he will rule as the servant of the best good of his people and die for their good. Now look at verse 33. Darkness falls.

It covers the whole land until three in the afternoon. As it were, God works so that the whole cosmos is upturned by these incredible events that are happening. And then at 3pm, Jesus joins the lament of the psalmist which Eric read earlier on.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And with a loud cry, he breathes his last. And at this moment, the curtain of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom.

The sanctuary, in other words, in the temple is profaned, it is dismissed and its valid use is finished. God has declared it. All that is needed now is its ultimate destruction. And that will happen according to the word of Jesus within 40 years.

It did. And of course, from this point on, Jesus will become the cornerstone and centre of a new temple made without hands. The very thing they had mocked him for, the very thing they had accused him of saying.

[7 : 17] This temple will be a house of prayer for all the nations as the temple had not been. And as if to seal this fact, a Gentile centurion speaks.

I want you to look at his words in verse 39. He says, remember he's Gentile, truly this man was God's son, the son of God.

In Mark's gospel, let me tell you, there is only one other person who calls Jesus the son of God.

There are some demons who do it in chapter 3, but only one other person, that is God himself.

And now, this foreigner lines up with God and declares it another time. Truly, this man was the son of God.

Friends, in these last few months here at 10 o'clock and at a number of our other services, we have gone through the whole of the gospel of Mark. Now, I want you to travel with me back to the beginning. Think about it.

[8 : 16] We've heard Jesus teach. We've travelled with Jesus for approximately three years, although it's only taken us a bit under, well, about nine months. But, you know, we've travelled with him as Mark has explained his ministry.

We have watched the temple authorities and the representatives of Jewish religion. We have seen them cling to their temple. We have overheard them scheme. We have overheard them hatch plots. We have looked over their shoulders as they paid off Judas. And here, we have seen them apparently triumph. Their opposition at this point has reached full flower.

Jesus has been arrested. He's been examined. He's been flayed, mocked, spat upon. He's died.

But in those same three years, we have seen some other things, haven't we?

We have seen the disciples of Jesus in action. We have watched Jesus teach them, instruct them, admonish them, encourage them. We've seen them see him walk on water, heal the sick, raise the dead, multiply food and drink.

[9 : 16] We have heard them hear the very voice of God. We have observed them, fail to understand him, betray him, deny him, and now, those very same disciples are nowhere to be seen.

Not only have the religious authorities apparently triumphed, the failure of the disciples is apparently complete. Mark does not mention them. Then there are some who watch the end, there are none who watch this end, except a couple of thieves, a small band of bystanders and passers-by, some mocking Jewish authorities and an understanding centurion.

And here is Jesus. A noble man, the noble man, the true man, a good man, the eternal son of God, alone, abused, exposed, naked, humiliated and disgraced, dying an unmentionable barbaric death, sharing the fate of violent men, criminals, robbers, slaves and foreigners, alone.

This is the same man who heard God's voice at his baptism. This is the same man who heard God's voice speak again in the middle of his ministry. And so we now look around, don't we, in anticipation at this, the end of his life.

We listen and we wait. We expect to hear God's voice again. And we wonder, where is God? Why won't he speak now?

[10:54] How could he approve of this? How could he remain silent at this point? But listen as we might, there is no voice, even as Jesus exhales and breathes his last.

But did you notice it? Our passage does have God speaking in one sense, not words, but in action. There are no words, no grand theophanies, no lightning, thunder, shattering noises.

No, there's nothing except the unseen within the temple, splitting of a curtain. An emphatic and somewhat hidden declaration from God whose voice didn't speak while his son was dying.

And with that sign, the father endorses the son, the temple, the temple authorities, the cult, the ritual, and everything it stood for has been surpassed and replaced.

And as if to seal it, the centurion speaks. This foreigner, this outsider, you see, there are no curtains now because of what Jesus has done, no curtains between God and us, no secrets, no closed doors, no insiders and outsiders, no special people, no barriers, but God for all who will take this deed upon themselves.

[12:12] That is, who will listen to what this man has done. God will, through him, give free access for all. Friends, in these dark events, God has answered our question and he has met our need.

Jesus himself preempted this, he foretold it, he promised that he would be our slave. That is, he said that he would give his life as a ransom for many.

His father turned his face away for us. He was silent for us. He, as it were, approved for us.

Jesus was crucified for us and in our place. He gave his life as a ransom for us. Together, he and his father allowed all of this for us.

Friends, please understand this. The events of this day that we remember today were very, very bad. But God allowed such bad in order to accomplish such good.

[13:24] through these things, he proclaimed his son to be the true king. He proclaimed his son to be his true son. Through his death in our place, he enabled his son to die for us.

Friends, I wonder if you could pause this day as you've come to do today and remember this. This event that we celebrate today lies at the heart of Christian faith.

It proclaims humanity to be evil and it proclaims God to be good and it proclaims Jesus to be God's good king.

So let me ask you, will you worship him today? Will you bow before him this day? Will you believe in him this day? And will you give your life to serve him this day?

Let us pray. Father, this day we thank you so much for your son's willing death on our behalf.

[14:41] Thank you for allowing him to do this. Thank you for your work together as father, son and holy spirit to accomplish this.

Father, we pray that as we celebrate the Lord's Supper today, that it will be with a renewed understanding of all that is accomplished through his death. Father, we pray that you would drive us to service of him, that you might be glorified.

And father, we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.