

GOOD FRIDAY - Crucified

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Preacher: Rod McArdle

[0 : 00] the one person in all of history I'd like to interview is Jesus Christ. I'd like to ask him if he indeed was virgin born, because the answer to that question would define history.

The words of Larry King, premier interviewer on the TV network CNN. Who is this Jesus? Who is this man that history records lived in Palestine in the early part of the first century?

He died hanging on a cross. What is that about? Well, I asked a group of grade five and grade sixes yesterday at the local primary school just those same questions.

The kids' answers were actually pretty good. In fact, they were a lot better than the answers that many people gave who met Jesus in the flesh in Palestine around 30 AD.

Who is Jesus? Who do you say that Jesus is? They're actually the questions that confront any reader of Mark's gospel.

[1 : 18] Who is Jesus? I mean, it's a pretty fundamental question, isn't it? And it's a question that gets more focus at Easter from your average Aussie than at other times.

Well, more focus in relative terms anyway. Not that the coverage in yesterday's press would actually support my contention. The Herald Sun started its edition with the headline, Family Tax Hit. Costello Ends Hope of Sweeping Reform. The Australian also led with a feature article on tax, but included a one-page article later on in the edition with the question, Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

The Age? Well, the Age was consumed by matters wheat, trucks, bribes, QCs, John Howard and the coal inquiry.

Who is Jesus? And why was he executed? I mean, the chief priests and the religious leaders, they had no doubt he was a blasphemer, claiming divinity.

[2 : 28] Crucify him. Crucify him. What do we do with blasphemers? We exterminate them. Crucify him. Crucify him.

The crowd and the religious leaders standing that day before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, took the terrorist Barabbas.

They took Barabbas rather than have Jesus. And Pilate, well, he was clearly uncertain as to what supposed evil Jesus had done.

But driven by personal political pragmatism, he sentenced Jesus to death. Flogged, spat upon and mockingly berated.

Hail, King of the Jews. Of course, execution by crucifixion was designed to achieve two things.

Firstly, prolong the pain of the victim, the accused, as long as possible.

[3 : 28] And secondly, publicly shame the accused, reinforcing the might of Roman authority. Now, the accused would typically carry the cross beam of the cross, larger than this representation here, probably weighing of the order of 50 kilograms.

And Jesus was clearly beaten so badly that the soldiers commanded a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the crossbar.

The place of crucifixion, Golgotha, we're not totally certain. Most likely, it was just outside the wall of Jerusalem, not far from a road, perhaps near the site of the present church of the Holy Sepulchre.

And at the site, there would have been an upright beam already in the ground, probably of the order of about three metres high. And Jesus would have been made to lay on the ground, arms outstretched, and then nailed to that cross beam.

The cross beam then would have been lifted up and fastened to the vertical pole. Jesus' feet then would have been nailed to the upright. Cicero describes crucifixion as that cruel and disgusting penalty.

[4 : 50] Mark actually doesn't go into the excruciating suffering of the crucifixion. Mark's readers would have been well acquainted with the barbarism of the act.

But Mark rather zeroes in on the abuse directed at Jesus. If you'd turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 15, page 829.

See, Mark zeroes in on the abuse. He zeroes in on the mocking placard that was on the cross and the scornful abuse of the bystanders.

Look with me at verse 29. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ah, you who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.

And Mark also zeroes in on the insults of the fellow victims. It was actually a common custom for the person who was being crucified to have written on a tablet or a placard the crime for which they were found guilty.

[5 : 56] And that placard would either be hung around their neck or taken in front of them to the place of crucifixion. The placard, the king of the Jews, reveals that Jesus has been found guilty of treason, of sedition.

But the wording on the placard is also Pilate's revenge. Revenge against the Jews for forcing his hand in the act of crucifying Jesus.

You see, Pilate mocks the Jews' pragmatic allegiance to Caesar by presenting this beaten-up Galilean as their king. And the scene that is then described from verse 32 on is full of irony.

Let me just highlight two points that come out of that. See, this title, the king of the Jews, is being used as sarcastic abuse by Jesus' enemies.

But the reality is the sign, the title, nonetheless, points to the true nature of Jesus. He is indeed king of kings and lord of lords.

[7 : 07] Jesus' enemies call on him to come down. But in fact, as readers of Mark's gospel know, it is precisely to fulfil his mission that Jesus is actually on the cross and he must remain there until the sacrifice, the sacrifice that he spoke of at the Lord's Supper, at the last supper, has been completed and his life given as a ransom for many, as we had read to us in Mark chapter 10.

And then from verse 33 on, Mark gives us four signs, four signs that show us that something of cosmic proportions is happening.

So let's look at the first one in verse 33, darkness. The Lord Jesus was on the cross for six hours from nine o'clock in the morning, the third hour, to the ninth hour, three o'clock in the afternoon. So for half of those six hours, he was seen by men. And for the last three hours, there was total darkness. You see, that's what verse 33 tells us.

But it's strange. I mean, the darkness comes at noon, the middle of the day, when the sun is meant to be at its highest and brightest. This is not a natural darkness.

[8 : 30] This is not an eclipse. The unnatural darkness tells us that this is a crucifixion unlike any other. Jesus' death is as extraordinary as his life.

Of course, through the Old Testament, darkness is a symbol of God's judgment. You'll remember at that scene in Egypt, at the Exodus. There were three days of darkness in the land of Egypt, the penultimate judgment, before the night of the Passover, Exodus 10.

The darkness was a sign that the land of Egypt was under the curse of God. And then Amos, the prophet Amos, uses the imagery of darkness to speak of the great day of judgment.

And at Golgotha, 2,000 years ago, there were three hours of darkness before the Lord died for the sins of the world. Darkness signifying God's wrath against sin.

Darkness for the Lord Jesus Christ so that we, who put our faith and trust in him, might have genuine light. Those last three hours, the Lord Jesus was seen only by God.

[9 : 47] His closest friends were not permitted to see the intensity of what he endured as he took upon himself the burden of the whole world's filthy, vile, and certainly deadly sin.

God made Christ, who had no sin, to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. What was happening then through those three hours of darkness?

Well, it is a mystery beyond our complete human understanding. We do know that God in Christ, in demonstration of supreme love, was laying down his life for sinners.

And we know that sin and all evil powers were confronted and defeated at the cross. So Mark gives us this first sign, darkness.

And then look with me to verse 38, the second sign, the torn curtain. After Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last, we read, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

[10:59] Now the temple in Jesus' day was Herod's temple, magnificent building, and it actually had two curtains. There was an outer curtain, and this was the one that one would enter in through from the courtyard into the holy place.

The holy place was the longer section of the temple. And then there was an inner curtain. Having come through the holy place, there was an inner curtain that separated that long rectangular section from the small holy of holies, which was a cuboid, only entered into by the high priest on the day of atonement.

Well, Mark doesn't tell us specifically which curtain was torn, but the writer to the Hebrews understands that the torn curtain was the inner curtain between the holy place and the holy of holies.

I want you to just imagine the incredible scene if you'd been in the temple because this veil between the holy place and the holy of holies was massive, probably in excess of 13 metres, about that thick, 8 centimetres, 3 inches for those who are still back in metric.

It required about 300 priests to move it, and it separated the holy place from the holy of holies and what happened? It split from top to bottom.

[12:28] 3 o'clock in the afternoon it would have been the time of the evening sacrifice, the time when an officiating priest would have entered the holy place.

So can you imagine if you were one of the priests standing there and just like that in a split second miraculously from top to bottom this huge veil is rendered apart.

Opening up the holy of holies, the place where only the high priest could enter and then only once a year. it could only be an act of God.

Well in our first reading this morning we heard that great passage from Leviticus 16 and you may remember in that passage that Aaron the high priest wasn't just allowed to come into the holy of holies any time.

You see this was the place where God had promised to actually appear above the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. No Aaron couldn't just go in there whenever he pleased.

[13:34] He could only enter once a year and he could only enter after there had been sin offerings for himself his household and that a goat had been sacrificed for the sins of the nation.

These sacrifices were an atonement. You may also remember in that reading that there was another goat and that other goat was symbolically sent away after Aaron had taken both of his hands laid it on the goat and confessed the iniquities of the assembly of Israel.

This was an intricate ritual. It needed to be repeated every year with no deviation and as well as the day of atonement there are of course daily sacrifices for sins of individuals.

But when Christ died no more sacrifices were needed. That's what the writer of the Hebrew says. Every priest stands day after day at his service offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and since then he's been waiting until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.

[14:55] Friends the barrier which kept men and women out of God's presence had been removed. So does that tell us that it's now just a free for all that you just sort of come as you like?

Not at all. We come into God's presence. We come before our heavenly father on one basis only. And that's on the basis of trusting in Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection.

Therefore my friends since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that Jesus opened up through the curtain that is through his flesh.

And since we have such a great high priest over the house of God let us approach with a pure heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

I want you to think about that. How else could it be that we enter into God's presence? Because it was God himself who paid the price for our sins.

[16:11] It was God himself who became the once for all perfect sacrifice. So there's free access now to God the Father through the work of the Son. God has now come close.

But I think it still leaves some questions in our mind as to what happened to allow such access. And so I want us to look at verse 34 for the third sign.

So darkness, the torn curtain, and the third sign showing that Jesus' death had cosmic proportions. See, if a crucified person on the cross typically would just lose their strength and go into a state of unconsciousness.

But actually in verse 34, what do we read? We read that Jesus cried out with a loud voice. He was in complete control of his faculties. my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And if you've been with us in recent weeks as we've gone through these last chapters of Mark, you'll know that Jesus has gradually been deserted, certainly by the crowds and then even by his closest friends.

[17 : 26] And now, now in this darkness, it seems, it seems as if Jesus is absolutely alone. without people, indeed without God.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? How then should we understand this cry of anguish from the cross?

Well, we can say this for certain, that Jesus has entered into our world, in all of its fullness, in all of its brokenness, all of its evil.

Jesus has identified with us in a very real way. He took on flesh and blood. He knows what it's like to live in this world, to live in this world under, actually, the shadow of death.

But there's more to the cry than just that. See, Jesus is quoting from the first verse of Psalm 22. This psalm is a cry for help.

[18 : 31] It depicts the suffering of God's faithful servant, exposed to the wickedness of the ungodly. And as the psalm progresses, you'll see that not only is the speaker saved, but in fact it finishes with salvation extending to the ends of the earth.

That's the flow of Psalm 22. But what is Jesus crying out when he quotes the first verse? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

I mean, could it be that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, who's taken on human flesh, has actually been separated from his heavenly father?

Could it be that? I want you to think this through very clearly with me this morning. God is one. We have all affirmed that as we've gone through the great litany.

father, son and holy spirit are united together and cannot be opposed or set against one another. There is no separation of persons in the Godhead.

[19 : 42] In fact, it's actually the union between the father and son that makes that cry from the cross so, well, profoundly shocking. Jesus is experiencing the wrath of God.

God, of course, Jesus had earlier in speaking about his coming death, had spoken of it as a baptism and of a cup to be drunk. Both of those are images of God's wrath.

Death itself is the manifestation of God's wrath. And especially crucifixion in Deuteronomy 21, we read that anyone who hangs on a tree was accursed by God.

Well, Jesus endured the cross, all of its suffering, all of its shame. And the father chose not to rescue him.

Indeed, if you've been here as we've been going through these last chapters of Mark, you remember that scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was the Lord's will to strike him.

[20 : 49] The father does not rescue the son. Why? So that Jesus will endure the wrath of God for the many.

For the many. For the many like you and me this morning. Jesus' death was a ransom that sets us free from the bondage of sin.

Mocked by insults, harsh and crude, in my place, condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. hallelujah, what a saviour.

You see, we need to see this cry of desolation from the cross, that in it the father, the son and the holy spirit are in the cry.

In the cross of Christ, God entered into his own wrath. The judge himself has been judged in our place. it was all three persons of the Trinity that took the initiative to save sinners like you and me.

[21 : 58] Whatever it was that happened on the cross was voluntarily accepted by the Godhead.

So in that disgusting scene of crucifixion, when the hatred of mankind and the evil powers of the cosmos conspired to execute, Jesus of Nazareth, we have in fact the supreme display of God's love for a fallen world.

Were the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, what's our response?

Demands my life, my soul, my all. God took the worst that man could do to his son and transformed it into the best thing that he could do for man.

God himself was the one who took the punishment for our sins. God himself was the one who bore the wrath that should have been on us. Why? Because each of us have actually rebelled against our creator.

Each of us have actually declared autonomy from our creator. God fully took on human flesh and he provided a perfect sacrifice.

[23 : 15] He provided a perfect sacrifice that in fact he was the only one that could provide it. You see, there could be no salvation for anyone if the humanity of Jesus Christ was not real.

Humanity has sinned against God. God's justice demands that humanity pays the penalty of sin. And simply the penalty can be paid by each of us as individual sinners or by a substitute.

And Jesus Christ came as our substitute. So the one who died on the cross as our substitute was God in Christ.

Fully God and fully man. And so he was uniquely qualified to be the one and only mediator. You see, there is free access to God the Father for all.

For all who are trusting in Jesus Christ, the one and only mediator. So there was darkness. This massive curtain was torn in two and this cry of desolation and anguish.

[24 : 29] And then the fourth sign that Mark gives us to show us the cosmic proportions of what was happening is in verse 39, the centurion statement. Around this cross there was an execution squad.

And earlier on in the passage we read that they had actually taken Jesus' clothes and they had divided them up amongst themselves. That also was actually fulfilment of a prophecy in Psalm 22. And this squad around the cross were led by a Roman centurion, a professional hard-nosed soldier, a Roman centurion who had absolutely no reason to be sympathetic to Jesus.

But Mark tells us in verse 39 that when the centurion who stood facing Jesus saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, truly, this man was God's son.

I want you to think hard about how amazing that statement is from the centurion.

[25 : 36] See, the centurion had never actually seen any of Jesus' miracles. The centurion hadn't been a disciple who had heard Jesus' interpretation of his coming death. The centurion had simply witnessed the mockery.

He'd witnessed the darkness. He'd heard the words of Jesus and the manner of his death. And amazingly for a Roman, the title properly belonged only to the emperor who was considered to be divine.

And this centurion, he actually bestows the title on a Jew who's just been executed. The centurion, in fact, was the first human witness to describe Jesus as the Son of God and actually mean it. So what a lesson on power for the centurion. The soldier sees a man dying, but he also sees the Son of God.

You see, the power of the cross gives itself for others, and it transforms death into life. life. And paradoxically, surprisingly, the cross is the place where the truth about the nature of God is revealed.

[27 : 06] Revealed to the centurion, revealed to the world. So Mark has identified for us some monumental signs that speak to us of the cosmic proportions of the crucifixion.

On the cross, a holy God did judge sin. On the cross, God himself suffered. He suffered so that we might be freed from the bondage of sin.

I think of it as the noose of sin that just progressively strangles us. The account reveals to us that we can approach God confidently because the barrier has been removed.

Approaching him only on the basis of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. How could it be any other way? And the cross shows that Jesus truly is the Son of God, underlined by the resurrection.

Well, the kids in my Christian education class, they did get the answer right, just like the centurion. Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God.

[28 : 22] You see, you don't need to go and do a Larry King style of interview. But on Good Friday morning, the question still remains, what is your answer to that question, who is Jesus?

But it's not as if I'm trying to set homework to get you ready for an appearance on who wants to be a millionaire. Because the Bible actually tells us that even the demons know that Jesus is the Son of God.

You see, the fundamental issue for each one of us is, what is our personal response to him? Do we ignore him? Certainly, if we go to the footy, we'd recognise that the main way that we consider Jesus in Australia is simply a swear word.

Or do we fall at his feet as our Saviour and our Lord? Forgiveness flows from the cross of Jesus Christ.

And so on this Good Friday morning, let me ask you, do you actually know that joy and that peace of sins being forgiven? because you can.

[29 : 38] What was achieved on the cross is applied to anyone, in fact, can be applied to everyone who turns from their rebellion, who turns from that state of saying, I'm not interested in you, God, I'm going to go and do my own thing, turns from that state and simply trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank you on this Good Friday morning that in your supreme love, your indescribable love, you gave your only son, the Lord Jesus Christ, so that anyone, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Lord, I pray for each of us this morning, for those who've been followers of the Lord Jesus for many years, that our hearts would be again full of joy and refreshed and invigorated with the wonder of your love, that God himself took the penalty and died for our sins.

Lord, this morning I pray for anyone who's here that knows in their heart that their sins have not been forgiven.

Lord, I pray that this morning that they would simply yield to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, turn from their declaration of autonomy, from their rebellion against their loving creator and embrace the Lord Jesus Christ and know the joy and the peace of sins forgiven and of an intimate personal relationship with the living God.

[31 : 35] Heavenly Father, we ask this for the sake and for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.