

The Death of The King

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[0 : 00] I enjoy a good movie, a good story, and often a good movie or story will move us in some way. For example, when I saw this movie as a kid, The Karate Kid, it moved me and my brothers to do karate on each other, much to my parents' dismay. I think we even managed to put a hole in the wall.

In fact, I think the movie's on tonight, so look out, my kids. When I was older, though, I watched this movie on the next slide with my wife. It moved her to tears and it moved me to boredom. I don't get it. I don't get it.

But when the story is real, when it's an event that happens in history, it's often much more moving, isn't it? During our recent history of COVID, in fact, only last year, there were some quite nice stories coming out.

When the panic buying first happened, two little girls in Queensland, aged six and four, asked if they could use their money they got from the tooth fairy to go and buy toilet paper and deliver it to people in their streets.

On the next slide is a picture of the two girls delivering toilet paper. Isn't that nice? Or during lockdown in the US, Bob had his 67th wedding anniversary, but he could not visit his wife in the aged care facility because they locked all visitors out.

[1 : 26] And so he made a sign and held it out up to her outside. Here it is on the next slide. And the sign says, I've loved you for 67 years and I still do. Happy anniversary.

And then Nancy, apparently from the window upstairs, blew kisses back. Isn't that a nice story? You see, true stories, events in history can move us, can't they?

It's why some movies say, based on a true story. It's hard to know how much is actually true, isn't it? But today's one is. It's backed by loads of historical evidence.

And so what I want to do this morning is hopefully help us hear it afresh, that it might rightly move us again. But first, as they do in the movies, previously in Matthew's gospel, we saw Jesus enter Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday.

And for those in the morning services, we saw this last Sunday. And the crowds declared him the king. The king from David's line, King David's family line, the one who is known as the Messiah or the Christ.

[2 : 41] Both titles mean king. And so the name, as you know, Jesus Christ, really means Jesus the king. But the crowds declared him this king by putting palm branches on the road.

And we still got one over there in the corner to make a kind of royal red carpet with their cloaks as well. And then they shouted Hosanna to the son of David, which means praise to God's promised king.

And if we were to read just before our reading, we would hear the Roman governor called Pilate at the time, wash his hands, even though he knew Jesus was innocent and said, fine, and handed Jesus over to be crucified.

And so the Roman governor did that. And part of the crucifixion process for Jesus, at least, included a whole lot of mocking. So that brings us now to a point one, but verse 27 in your sheet.

So the top paragraph there, have a look and follow along. Then the governor's soldiers, Pilate's soldiers, took Jesus into the praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.

[4 : 05] They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand.

Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. Hail, king of the Jews, they said. They spat on him and took the staff and struck him on their head again and again.

After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. The whole company of soldiers in those days was about 600 men. And they crowd in for some entertainment, mocking the king. They dress him in a purple robe, give him a staff or a scepter, a crown of thorns pushed into his head. They mockingly hail him king of the Jews. The irony, of course, is that he is king of the Jews, indeed king of the world.

[5 : 09] And yet he suffers their mocking, their spitting, and beating again and again. It's a moving event, isn't it? And then in verse 32, we read, as they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

They came to the place called Golgotha, which means place of the skull. There they offered Jesus wine to drink mixed with gall, but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

And sitting down, they, the soldiers, kept watch over him there. Above his head, they placed a written charge against him. This is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

The fact that Matthew, our gospel writer here, names both Simon and his place of origin, suggests that Simon actually joined the disciples and got to know each other because of this event.

Either way, he helped carry the cross, especially after Jesus had taken such a beating. And he carried it to Golgotha, the place of the skull, morbid way of referring to a place of death.

[6 : 23] Most likely outside Jerusalem in a public place where people could pass by as they do in verse 39. And according to Mark, we're told that it's 9 a.m. in the morning.

And so at 9 o'clock in the morning, there, they nailed him to a cross. And as he hung there, they offer him a deliberately distasteful drink as further mockery.

And as he hung there, the sign above him proclaimed him king of the Jews. Again, the irony, he is king of the world. And as he hung there, they cast lots for his clothes because Romans would often crucify people naked just to add to the humiliation.

Can you imagine being on display like that? Just to help you understand how shocking this is, can you imagine someone doing this to the Queen of England?

And yet they're doing it to God's promised king. It's a moving event, isn't it? And what's more, the mocking continues.

[7 : 32] Verse 38, third paragraph. Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself.

Come down from the cross if you're the son of God. In the same way, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself.

He's the king of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Well, let God rescue him now if he wants him. For he said, I am the son of God. In the same way, the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Jesus cops it left, right and center, doesn't he? Not only from the soldiers, but now he's mocked from the passers-by, from the religious leaders and even from the criminals beside him.

If it were me, I tell you what, I would retaliate. At the very least, I think I'd say, well, wait until I'm raised from the dead, then you're going to get it. Actually, more likely, with his power, I'd jump down from the cross and go, aha, suckers, take that.

[8 : 51] But Jesus does nothing. Jesus says nothing. Can you imagine the restraint he must have had?

Can you imagine his determination, his willingness to endure this for us? It's a moving event, isn't it?

But all this was part of God's plan for his promised king. I don't know if you noticed, but on the next slide, there are all these, next one, sorry, there are all these references from our first reading in Psalm 22.

And as Estelle read it, I don't know if you noticed, this actually sounds a lot like Jesus. And there are lots of echoes. Psalm 22, verse 18, David says they divide my clothes by casting lots. Well, that's what happens here to Jesus in verse 35.

For the next slide, David says, all who see me mock me. They hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him. It's almost word for word.

[9 : 54] What we read here, those who pass by hurled insults, shake their heads, mock. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him. And of course, on the next slide, in a moment, as David said, Jesus will also say, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

These are just some of the Old Testament connections in this passage. But the point is, this is not random mocking. This is all part of God's plan to show that this Jesus is the true son of David, the true king who walks in David's shoes in an even greater way.

And through his suffering and death will save many. Which brings us to his death, the second point in verse 45. Have a look at verse 45, second last paragraph.

From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eli, Eli, Lema Sakathani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, he's calling Elijah. Immediately, one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff and offered it to Jesus to drink.

[11 : 14] The rest said, now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him. And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

See, by noon, Jesus had been hanging on a cross for three hours, nine o'clock being crucified, hanging there until about noon. And then from noon till three, another three hours, darkness comes all over the land.

It was symbolizing the judgment that Jesus was about to take. And we know that because that's what we see in the Old Testament. On the next slide, God says to the prophet Amos that Israel was right for judgment, because it goes on to say they have mistreated God, and they have mistreated one another, particularly the poor and the needy.

And then God goes on to say on the side there, in the second paragraph, in that day, that day that he judges Israel, this is what it's going to be like. I will make, notice, the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight.

I will make that time like morning for an only sun, and the end of it like a bitter day. And what's happening here, that first Good Friday?

[12 : 36] Well, the sun goes down at noon. It darkens the land in broad daylight. And God is about to mourn his only son.

And not for Jesus' mistreatment of God, or mistreatment of others, but actually for ours. For all the times we've lived without reference to God, or acted selfishly to others.

All the times we've not honoured God, or been loving to others, whether with our thoughts, our words, our deeds. As we sung earlier in our service, it was my sin that held him there.

Unless we think our sins are insignificant, then notice that this suffering here, is presented as actually more severe, than being nailed to the cross.

Back in verse 35, if you just skip back to the second paragraph there, and to the middle, notice that the crucifixion is almost mentioned in passing. When they crucified him, they divided up his clothes.

[13 : 48] It's just kind of mentioned in passing, isn't it? We hear nothing of the nails being driven in. We hear nothing of Jesus' pain. But later, when we come down to verse 45, we're told of this symbol of judgment, darkness, lasting three hours.

And we're told of Jesus' cries of agony twice. It's because taking our judgment for our sins, is much worse than physically, just being nailed to the cross, you see.

I notice, though, that Jesus took it willingly for us. Verse 50, end of second last paragraph there, when Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

Not in terms of giving up and quitting, because it's too hard, but in terms of willingly handing it over, to take our judgment. He willingly gives up his spirit, to suffer our judgment.

In 1973, a writer named William Hendrickson wrote this of this event. On the slide there, he says, the darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God upon our sins.

[15 : 04] His wrath, as it were, burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus, so that he, as our substitute, suffered the most intense agony, indescribable woe, and terrible isolation.

Hell came to the cross that day, and the Savior descended into it, and bore its full horrors in our place. It's a moving event, isn't it?

But it's also a personal event. As the quote says, he bore the horrors in our place. Place. So although Jesus died years ago, his death is still the payment for our sin today, for you and me,

which makes it a personal event.

And what's more, it's also an effective event. Most people know this already, but you know, oil and water don't mix, right? You need a detergent to mix them together.

I think that's right. We've got some science buffs here. I'll have to check with that later, but I'm pretty sure that's right. Well, so also, a sinful people cannot mix with a holy God. And so last Sunday, I showed you this picture of the temple in Jerusalem that Jesus rode into and visited.

[16:25] And we looked at the court of Gentiles where they had the marketplace. But this week, we're going to zoom in a bit more on the next slide and have a look at the inner part where the holy place was the front bit, and then it kind of narrowed to the longer most holy place.

And the most holy place is where the presence of God was to dwell in particular. But because a sinful people cannot mix with a holy God, then only the high priest could enter God's presence and only once a year, no one else.

And so to keep them safe, there was this big curtain on the next slide. So we're in the holy place looking at the curtain and behind there was the most holy place, separating God from the rest of people.

And so to go back to the model, this is a cross section, that's where it would have sat in the model. But Jesus' death acts as the detergent, you see.

For as Jesus dies and takes our judgment, look what happens next in our last paragraph, verse 51. At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

[17:39] The earth shook, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. And they came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

You see, because Jesus suffers our judgment for our sin, then the temple curtain was can you imagine that?

Torn in two. And on the next slide, Tim, the presence of God can now be accessed by all. All can be forgiven, no longer separated.

We can have access to God now with life eternal. That's what the tombs bursting open represents, life from death. All because Jesus paid for our sin that Friday.

You see, his death was effective, which makes this event in history good news and makes today good Friday. But it was a moving event because it not only moved Simon of Cyrene to become a disciple, it seems, it also moved the centurion and those with him to confess Jesus as the Son of God, the divine King.

[19:00] Have a look at verse 54. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and exclaimed, surely he was the Son of God.

Now, these men had seen many die before, they'd seen many crucified before. And yet, as they watched Jesus mocked and willingly die and all that followed, they knew this was no ordinary death. In fact, they knew this was no ordinary man. It moved them, didn't it? No longer to mock, but to exclaim, surely he was the Son of God, the divine King.

There are events in history which when we hear them afresh can move us. I've seen that happen as we've heard about what the soldiers did on that first Anzac Day when we remember coming up at the end of this month.

But how much more so this event? Now, if we reflect on how it was our sin that caused his pain, it ought to move us. If we reflect on how he willingly took our judgment so we could share his glory, then it ought to move us.

[20:14] And if we reflect on how deep the Father's love is to have his only Son even for a moment die for us, forsaken for us, it ought to move us.

It ought to move us firstly to do what that centurion did to confess Jesus as King, to believe in him as your King who died for your sin, to cling to the cross as we saw before.

Have you done that yet? Today's a great day to start to believe in him. I'm going to pray a short prayer at the end in moments and you can take that opportunity if you like.

And for those who already do believe, then it ought to move us to continue joyfully serving Jesus as our King like we saw in the morning last Sunday or like the Bible says on the screen today, Christ died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

For the people I mentioned last Sunday in the morning, this means that they continue to joyfully trust in Jesus despite the chemo not currently working on one of their cancers.

[21 : 35] For a family I know it means they said no to a Sunday morning breakfast with their non-Christian parents and asked if they could come to lunch instead so they could still come to church.

For a friend of ours it meant turning down a promotion because the promotion involved a lot of travel on the weekends and she would miss a church and the fellowship of that and so she actually turned down money and promotion.

Who's heard of that? For another person I know it meant changing courses at uni. His current course had a culture of getting drunk and he'd only just become a Christian and he knew that would be too tempting for him and it'd be easy to slip into that way of life and so he actually changed university courses so he could better follow Jesus.

Or for many others at our church I know it meant continuing to follow Jesus despite losing their spouses and they all did this because they remembered what Christ had done for them and were moved to keep following him as king not out of guilt but out of heartfelt thanks for that very first Good Friday.

Some time ago I saw a news article from the UK on the next slide the headline read I owe him my life the moving story of a daughter and her father's selfless act.

[23 : 04] On the next slide is the father and daughter Clemmie and her father Jeremy it turns out the daughter had kidney problems and needed a transplant and so her father Jeremy immediately offered one of his and to her credit the daughter responded by saying this on the next slide she said it's hard to put into words just how much what my father did means to me I owe him my life not out of guilt but out of heartfelt thanks for what her father did that very first good friday our heavenly father gave much more than a kidney didn't he he gave his only son the promised king and Jesus willingly went to the cross not so we could have another 80 90 or 100 years in this world but so we could have access to God in this world and life eternal in the world to come how much more so then ought we be moved to respond like that girl with heartfelt thanks saying yeah I owe him my life or in the words of our next hymn dear saviour how can I repay the debt of love I owe Lord take my very self I pray your work your will to do let's pray and if you would like to confess him as your king today then please echo these lines in your heart and head silently after me dear God thank you for sending your promised king to die for me thank you that he took my judgment in my place please help me to follow him as my saviour and king in Jesus name we pray amen to