

The King of the Kingdom Dies

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Date: 14 April 2017

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, let me pray before we start. Father, even as the words of the Gospel of Matthew were read, we pray that they will continue to resound in our hearts and our minds as we reflect on the goodness of Jesus on Good Friday and of your great act of salvation for us.
- We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, it's customary when someone dies that we eulogize them. We reflect on the person that they were, giving praise to their contributions to society and reflecting with fondness on our relationship with them.
- Well, today is Good Friday, the day that we especially remember the death of Jesus. Of course, we do that with the knowledge that, unlike every other person, Jesus did not remain dead.
- He's alive. He rose again gloriously after three days. That is what Easter Sunday is, and we'll get to that in a couple of days.
- But for today, we want to reflect on why this is Good Friday. Give praise to Jesus. Give praise to God for what he's done in Christ.
- [1 : 2 1] And yet, I have to admit that as I read and reread our readings today, what comes across firstly is not the goodness of Good Friday, but actually the injustice of the events of Jesus' death, of how the people in the drama were so blind to what they were doing, on how they were so bent on evil that they cared not for its consequences.
- If only they had stopped to reflect on what they were doing, then this miscarriage of justice wouldn't have occurred. For one, an innocent man wouldn't have been condemned to death.
- Second, Israel's rightful king would not have been rejected. And third, God's divine son would not have died.
- Well, I'm going to reflect on each of these in turn this morning. So first, Jesus was an innocent man, yet he was condemned to death. Now, from time to time, we do hear of innocent people being convicted and wrongfully imprisoned.
- Perhaps the DNA evidence was mishandled, or sometimes the jury gets it wrong. But this wasn't the case with Jesus, was it? Because as we read the text, we find that they all knew that Jesus was innocent.
- [2 : 4 7] And yet, they chose to condemn him to death. Now, from the chief priest in chapter 26, which we didn't read today, who hunted down the witnesses willing to give false testimony to Judas in the passage just before our reading, again, we did not get to that, who tried to return the silver coins to the elders after he was filled with remorse.
- I mean, he knew Jesus was innocent, wasn't he? Because he admits in verse 4, I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood. He tried to do that only for the elders to wash their hands of his betrayal.
- They didn't want to have anything to do with it. And so as we read, everything that they did betrayed their knowledge that Jesus was innocent of their accusations.

Then, of course, when we get to our passage today, we see Pilate, don't we? Who was warned by his wife in verse 19. She was tormented by all these dreams that she was having. But she warned him not to have anything to do with this innocent man.

Now, Pilate, of course, he knew that himself because he could see that the elders were not motivated by justice, but by self-interest. And yet, because he feared the crowds, he shrinks from doing what's right, and he too washes his hands of that decision.

[4 : 10] And so he says in verse 24, I am innocent, how ironic, of this man's blood. It is your responsibility. Now, if anything like that ever happened today, I'm pretty sure that all of social media would be up in arms.

Tweets will be retweeted a million times over. Now, after all, if you compare what was done to Jesus, it's surely worse than what happened this week, didn't it, to that poor man, some of you might know, who was evicted from that overbooked United Airlines flight.

In case you're not aware, these were the images that got posted all over the internet. They showed how he was forcibly evicted from the flight and then ended up, you know, face full of blood because they assaulted him.

But this, what is being done to Jesus, would surely have been worse than that. Further, if ever our government or any other institution, like a church or a school, tried to absolve themselves of their responsibilities, like Pilate and the elders did, we wouldn't stand for it, would we?

For that's precisely what those in charge are meant to do. They're meant to administer justice instead of passing the buck or turning a blind eye to abuse.

[5 : 32] To do that merely brings that guilt directly upon themselves, which is what Pilate, the elders and Judas did. When they condemned Jesus, even though he was innocent, they brought that guilt upon themselves and no amount of hand washing could absolve them from that.

Now, ironically, if you read it, it's the clueless crowd that actually naively take on this responsibility, don't they? They shout in verse 25 as they're crying out for Jesus' crucifixion, let his blood be on us and on our children.

And yet they all knew that Jesus was innocent and yet condemned him to death. But if that wasn't bad enough, then secondly, what the people also did by this act was to reject Jesus as their rightful king.

For this was not just any king, this was their own king, the Messiah that they had been waiting for all this while, the one that they hoped would restore the kingdom of Israel. Now again, if you read the text, the elders and people knew enough of what Jesus had said and done to appreciate his claim to kingship.

Only a few days earlier, last week, in fact, on Sunday, in chapter 21, they witnessed his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. They witnessed him cleansing the temple with all the shouts of Hosanna to the son of David.

[6 : 59] These were fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. And they knew because it showed that Jesus was no ordinary teacher. or a mere prophet. Rather, this was Jesus coming in as a king, asserting his authority over Israel in her capital, Jerusalem, and at the temple.

And yet here, urged on by the elders, they reject their rightful king. Actually, to say rejected is probably too mild a word. for they mocked him.

They humiliated him. They mistreated him. So asked by Pilate in verse 17, whether they wanted to free Barabbas, also called Jesus, ironically, or Jesus, the Messiah, they chose Barabbas.

He was an insurrectionist, as we find out in the Gospel of Mark. And so what they chose was the fake Messiah rather than the real one. And then with Jesus hanging on the cross, they heaped insult after insult at their king.

Even the two robbers hanging by his side got in on the act. But of course, the whole scene is highly ironic, isn't it?

- [8 : 17] Because without knowing it, their mocking and their insults actually testified to Jesus' true kingship. And so in verse 28, when the guards put a scarlet rope on him, a sign of royalty, when they twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head and put a staff that is a symbol of rule in his right hand before kneeling in front of him in fake adoration, they were truly in the presence of a king.

They may have mocked him, but what they asked was true. Hail, King of the Jews. They were right. Likewise, the sign over Jesus' head on the cross in verse 37 reads, This is Jesus, King of the Jews.

Again, it was designed to mock, and yet, it was true. It was true for all to see. And those pastors by, well, they kept asking Jesus to prove his kingship by coming down from the cross.

which brings us to the third point that Jesus is God's divine son and yet he had to die. Now, how can this be?

And here, I speak humanly, of course, but if Jesus truly is the son of God, then surely, surely he cannot hang defenselessly on the cross.

- [9 : 44] Those who insult him have a point, don't they? for if Jesus is truly who he says he is, the king of Israel, the son of God, then he surely could get down from the cross.

He could summon his divine powers to show his divine authority. Or if, most inexplicably, that couldn't happen, then surely God his father, he could and would come and rescue him.

for this is God's son, the one he loves, in whom he is well pleased. After all, then the disciples hear those very words at Jesus' baptism and then again at his transfiguration.

And then when we hear Jesus cry from the cross in verse 46, we could be forgiven for thinking that God had indeed turned his back on him. For there in the darkness, Jesus cries out in a love voice, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, that is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Has even God forsaken his son? And yet, those of us who are Christians, we know this isn't so.

- [11 : 05] That all this time, even though the elders, Pilate, and everyone else had been acting unjustly and therefore rightly bringing guilt on themselves, everything was going exactly to God's plan.

For this is what was needed for Jesus to save the world. It was precisely because Jesus wanted to save others that he couldn't do what the mockers want, get down from the cross to save himself.

He wouldn't do it even if he could. And even though as an innocent man, he had the right to. Now, I don't know what your experience with guilt is, but it can be a very crushing thing, is it?

If ever I wrong say my wife or children, which sadly happens more than I'd like, then the burden of guilt can really stay for a while. Even after I've said sorry, even after they've graciously forgiven me, the thought that I've hurt someone I love, that nothing I do can really undo that, brings a deep regret that weighs on me.

And this guilt is not something that's made up, is it? I know some people now say that if only we got rid of the moral police, if people just stopped judging one another and putting each other on guilt trips, that we'll all be free from guilt.

- [12 : 26] But you just have to look at Judas and the remorse he felt. No one put that on him. It was entirely of his own doing, of his own conscience catching up with his actions.

And he couldn't just shake that off even if he tried. And that's the same with us. No good that we do can make up for it, for that guilt.

No compensation can undo the wrong that we've done. It's like trying to get a perfect mark for a subject at school. I've only ever tried that once, rarely.

It's hard. Except, what happens is that once you've made a mistake on that very first test at the start of the term, then even if you scored 100% for every other subsequent test, you'll never erase that mistake, would you?

You'll never get that 100%. At most, it might be 99% or something. But of course, our lives aren't even like that, is it? Because we don't just make a mistake in the first test, we keep making mistake after mistake, even though we try hard not to.

[13 : 35] We keep messing up and the guilt just keeps accumulating. So there's really no way out, is there? Except if someone perfect comes along and volunteers to swap his mark with you.

which is exactly what Jesus offers to do for all who put their trust in him by dying on the cross for us. The Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 6 and verse 23 that the wages of sin is death.

Well, the good news is that Jesus has agreed to pay that wage, which is why despite all the injustice that transpired on that day, the flogging, the mocking, the rejection, the humiliation, and ultimately the death of God's divine Son, what comes out of it is infinitely good.

We have this wonderful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. And to that question, what do we make of God's forsaking of his Son?

Well, Jesus did say that, my God, my God, why did you forsake me? But we are not to see it as something that God did because he was powerless to act, much less because he refused to act.

[14 : 52] Rather, this is the forsakenness that comes when in the eternal love of the Father for his Son, God nevertheless restrains himself from ending his Son's suffering, so that together he and his Son and by his Spirit, they can then accomplish what they set out to do from the beginning.

They may not have been another parting of heaven with a loud booming voice as it happened at baptism, but I believe that God made his thoughts known at the moment of Christ's death.

So, if you look at verse 51, we find that where just as Jesus gave up his Spirit, the curtain of the temple behind which God's presence dwells, that curtain was ripped apart from top to bottom.

The earth shook instead and the rocks split apart. Many tombs broke open and holy people were raised to life, giving us a foretaste of what Jesus' death has accomplished, eternal life to all who believe in him.

So, God is saying in these events that Jesus is my Son. to all those mockers, Jesus is saying, Jesus is my Son, and that in him and in his death, he is well pleased.

[16 : 14] And so great were these events that even the centurion and his guards, who hours earlier were probably the ones who were mocking him and dividing up his clothes, while they now stand and exclaim, surely he was the Son of God.

and how right they were. Friends, the guilt in our lives is real. Unless someone is perfect here or has no conscience, what our guilt shows is where we truly stand before God.

And the weight of that guilt rightly reveals to us the punishment we deserve for our wrongdoing. But the wonderful news is that when we put our trust in Jesus, the burden of that guilt is truly lifted from us.

We are truly forgiven for the wrong we've done and even the wrong that we continue to do, even as we try and live rightly for him.

And sure, the mess that we've created may still need to be sorted out and it's not easy by any means, I'm sure. But what we have is God's offer of forgiveness and eternal life, which is what he promises in that second part of Romans chapter 6 and verse 33.

[17 : 25] So the first part says the wages of sin is death, and then the second part says, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. I recently discovered that a friend of mine, a Christian, had fallen into sin, and the damage to his life and those he loves is just devastating.

It's horrible what's happened. Now to his credit, when he was found out, he was fully repentant and full of remorse and sorrow, even though I think he realizes the impact of what he's done, will stay with him for a long time.

And when I spoke to him, there were lots of tears, lots of regrets, and yet thankfully, he knew the forgiveness of God. He knew that Jesus' blood washes away his guilt.

and given the challenges that lies ahead of him, I think it was really good for him to know that. It was a great comfort for him to know that even though he had a lot of other challenges to face, he didn't need to carry this burden, the guilt, the punishment, and the judgment of God.

He didn't need to do that because Jesus had taken it upon himself on the cross. So friends, if there's anyone here today whose life has been ridden with guilt from the past, then let me urge you too to come to Jesus in faith.

[19 : 01] He alone can take that guilt upon himself. In fact, he's already done that. He's died on the cross for us. And in his place, we will find forgiveness and eternal life.

And for those of us who already know that freedom in Christ, then even though as we reflect on this great injustice on Good Friday, we can rejoice, can't we?

We can praise God for what he's done, for all the good that has come out of human sinfulness. So let me do that right now.

Let us pray and give thanks to God for that. Father, we thank you for your love for us. we thank you that you sent your son Jesus to take our place for all of us who may have great and deep regrets from things that we've done in the past and things we're still trying to sort through.

We thank you that we have this great offer of forgiveness and of life in Christ Jesus. That Jesus has paid the price for us.

[20 : 19] Help us to cast this burden of guilt onto your son and take upon us the righteousness that he gives. Help us to reach out and just grab hold of this freedom that we have in Christ.

we pray this and ask this in the name of your son who died for us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.