

Why the Cross?

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, after the tragic and dark events of Good Friday, Jesus was now dead. He's then taken down from the cross. And a man called Joseph of Aramaphia was also a member of the Sanhedrin council.
- He's granted permission by the Roman governor, Pilate, to take Jesus' body down and bury it. Which is interesting. It's interesting because he was part of that Sanhedrin council who condemned Jesus to death back in Mark chapter 14 at verse 64.
- So something has clearly changed in Joseph's mind. In his heart. Something between Jesus' condemnation and then his crucifixion.
- Maybe it was the way that Jesus responded to being interrogated. Maybe it was how Jesus was arrested and then he received abuse and being flogged.
- The way he responded to that. Or maybe it was the darkness that fell upon the land in the sixth hour. Or the temple curtain being ripped in two. That something.
- [1 : 0 6] Something changed in Joseph on this bleak and cruel day. Joseph began to see something in Jesus. Something which he clearly hadn't noticed or seen before.
- And so Joseph quite boldly asks for Jesus' body. And then he wraps it in fresh linen. And then he places it in what was probably a family tomb. The tomb is then sealed with a large stone.
- Which was the custom, the practice with such tombs. Somehow Joseph's eyes have been opened. And as a consequence he boldly asks the Roman governor Pilate for Jesus' body.
- Which was certainly a bold thing to do. If you think about the hierarchy of that period of time. There was also an act of love.
- Compassion as well. And it's also the same for us as Christians, isn't it? When we see Jesus for who he really is. Our response should be bold.
- [2 : 1 0] Generous. And compassionate. Because it takes boldness. Generosity and compassion. To actually make any impact. On what appears to be a very hard cold world.
- That we live in today. Well it's now the morning of the third day. What today we call Easter morning. And it's the women. Mary Magdalene. Mary the mother of James.
- And Salome. Who set out just after dawn to go back to the tomb. Anoint Jesus' corpse with the customary spices. It may well have been customary.
- But these were genuinely grieving friends. Friends who had spent time with Jesus. Friends who wanted to show one final act of love. Notice it's not Jesus' disciples.
- Remember some of them scattered in the garden. Straight after Jesus' arrest. Peter. Infamously followed Jesus. But then denied him three times. The other disciples appear to be lying low somewhere.
- [3 : 0 9] Fearful of the authorities. And it's the women. It's the women who are bold enough. To visit the tomb. On the way to the tomb. They discussed the practical problem.

Of how they're going to roll this large stone. From the entrance. So you can imagine their absolute surprise. And shock. That when they arrive. They discover the stone has already been.

Rollled away or removed. The obstacle they feared would hinder them. Has actually been taken care of. It would be natural.

To fear that someone. Had interfered with the grave. And possibly stolen. Jesus' dead body. But when they enter. They encounter this young man. Dressed in a white robe. No one could have anticipated that.

And so their natural reaction is. I suppose surprised. Unfounded. Confusion. And even fear. But the angelic messenger reassures them. Don't be alarmed.

[4 : 09] And what he tells them. Is absolutely mind blowing. It's incredible. To paraphrase it. This young man says. Jesus who is crucified. Has risen.

He's not here in the tomb. Look with your own eyes. And now go and tell everyone. That's a gospel imperative. Isn't it? For us. Go and tell. Everyone.

Go and tell people. You've seen with your own eyes. That Jesus is not here. He has risen. Of course today. We are. 2,000 years on. From that story.

And it's with eyes of faith. That we need to see. But the imperative. To tell everyone. Is still there. Isn't it? The great challenge is.

Do we tell everyone? Do we tell anyone? That Jesus has risen. That there is hope. So why the cross?

[5 : 07] Why the cross? There's an image there. I think. Following the highs of last Sunday. Last Sunday of course.

Was Palm Sunday. And that Jesus enters Jerusalem. On the colt of the donkey. I don't know. Did last Sunday. Maybe you did have somebody. Preaching about Palm Sunday here.

Or mentioning it soon. The people of the city. Laid palm branches. And cried Hosanna. This was now. Jesus. Final week. The week of Passover.

A week which will culminate. In the events. The cosmic events. You could say. Of the cross. As Jesus walked through those temple courts. In that week.

The chief priests. And the teachers of the law. Are desperate to find a way. To get rid of Jesus. To trap Jesus. Not only them. But also Pharisees.

[6 : 01] Herodians. And the Sadducees. Quite a crowd. That were desperate. To get their hands on Jesus. And shut him up. And get rid of him. All of them. Attempting to trap Jesus.

So they could have him arrested. So this account comes immediately. After these events. One of the teachers of the law. Says to Jesus. Of all the commandments.

Which is the most important one. To keep. And Jesus replies. Love the Lord your God. With all your heart. And with all your soul. And with all your mind. And with all your strength.

The second is. Love your neighbour. As yourself. There's no commandment. Greater than these. Well my challenge. To all of us.

Including me. This morning. How well. Are we keeping these. Commandments. Are we loving God. With all our heart. And our soul. And are we loving our neighbours.

[6 : 58] Like we love ourselves. I would estimate. That most Highland communities. If we had all the churches together. Of course it's a bit difficult. Because people do travel to church.

Out with their communities. So there's a lot of. Mobile. If you like. Congregations in that sense. But I roughly calculate. That the Christian. Worshipping population. In most Highland communities.

Will be somewhere in the region. Of between. Four. And eight percent. Of the local. Population. That's not much is it. Which tells us. That we are in fact.

A relatively small proportion. Of these communities. That people actually. Come to church. On a Sunday morning. And worship God. And I suppose in a way.

That kind of answers that question. Doesn't it. About keeping the greatest commandment. Then you probably didn't need me. To tell you that anyway. Because every day.

[7 : 53] Our news is filled. Isn't it. With stories that remind us. About the people. That don't. Worship God. And they don't love their neighbour. As themselves. We live today.

In a very secular. A pagan society. A society. Which encourages. The love of things. Or love of other things. Maybe it's celebrities. Music stores.

Or sports. Personalities. Or politics. Or nationalism. Or material things. Or just a plain love of ourselves. When it comes to God.

The majority of people in Scotland. Have learned to love. Other things. God is our creator. And he's infinitely worthy. Of our attention.

And our respect. Therefore. Failure to love him. Is a serious matter. It's not just a trial matter. It's almost treason really. God is holy. God is just.

[8 : 46] And he cannot leave. Sin unpunished. We can't just sweep. The injustices. Of this world. Under the carpet. So to speak. We can't just. Hide them away. As if they've never.

Happened. I mean. Vladimir Putin. May have been. Absolved by the Russian. Orthodox Church. But God is not going to. Forget. Is he. The injustices. Of what's gone on.

In Ukraine. Or Myanmar. Or parts of all Yemen. And so on. The Bible tells us. That the wages of sin. Is death. Pretty black and white.

Isn't it. Romans 6 verse 23. It's like a curse. That hangs over humanity. God's anger. God's wrath. Against sin. And evil. Excuse me.

And that's where the cross comes in. Because God's demand for justice. Meets with. God's love. On that cross. God is not just content.

[9 : 44] To show only wrath. But also desires. To show love as well. Doesn't he. And so the sentence of death. Upon sin. Is absorbed. By God's son. Jesus Christ.

Jesus does not just. Cancel. God's wrath. He kind of absorbs it. And the sentence is spent. But it's spent. On God's son.

Jesus. And not. On us. That is the. Primary function. Of us. As a church really. To faithfully communicate.

The love of God. The message of hope. That God himself. And the person. His own son. Has absorbed God's justice. On human sin. And it's only when.

By the grace of God. It's only when. Our eyes are. Opened. That we can see. Just what God. Has actually done for us. How much. He's loved us. He's loved us enough.

[10 : 38] To die for us. That's what the cross is. Justice. And love. As Paul says. In his book. In Romans. We are.

Justified. Justice has been met. And has been. Satisfied. We are. Justified. The cross. Jesus Christ. In this.

Final message. We learn. That in the. Mysterious ways of God. God uses. Evil and suffering. To become. Evil. And suffering. In the passion.

Of Jesus Christ. Jesus is mocked. And flogged. And then is crucified. It's one of the most. Brutal and cruel. Ways. To kill someone. To execute someone. We learn.

In Genesis. The evil. Enters this world. Through. This fear. Called Satan. But we really have. Little understanding. Of it beyond that. In a way. The depravity.

[11 : 38] And depths of evil. And corruption. And so on. Are almost a mystery to us. And yet. Throughout history. God has worked through. Evil. And turned it around. For good.

To lead people. In the way of righteousness. For those of you. Know the story. From Genesis. About Joseph. The son of Jacob. That's Joseph. The one who has. The coat of many colors.

Joseph was sold. Into slavery. By his brothers. And then he was taken. To Egypt. Later. It's a lot later. Joseph became. Prime minister. Of Egypt.

And saved many lives. During a time. Of great famine. But not only. Does he save. The life. Of the Egyptians. He also saves. The lives. Of the very ones. Who sold him.

Into slavery. His brothers. Joseph says to them. You meant it. For evil. Against me. But God. Meant it. For good. Genesis.

[12 : 35] Chapter 50. Verse 20. The lashes. In the back. Of Jesus. The fawns. That pierce his head. The bruises. Upon his face.

And the nails. Driven through his hands. And feet. The desertion. Of his friends. All the result. Of corruption. And sin. In this world. All the result. Of evil. And yet.

By these things. Jesus. Destroys. The very power. Of sin. And evil. There can be no greater sin. Surely. Than to hate God so much.

That you kill his son. Jesus was innocent. His suffering. Immense. Yet God is clearly. Bringing about. Salvation. Through him. There are amazing words.

In the Old Testament. In the book of Isaiah. And when you think about. Isaiah was written. 700 years. Before. The birth of Jesus. In Isaiah. Chapter 53. And they make absolutely clear.

[13 : 32] It was always God's plan. To crush. The Messiah. Because by him. He destroys the power. Of sin and evil. In Isaiah. Chapter 53.

At verse 5. It says. He was. Pierced. For our transgressions. He was crushed. For our iniquities. The punishment. That brought us. Peace. Was upon him.

And by his wounds. We are healed. Incredible words. Written. 700 years. Before the crucifixion. Through the passion.

Of Christ. We learn. That there is no sin. No evil. That is too great. That God in Christ. Cannot bring everlasting joy. And righteousness. From. That's the message of Easter.

A message. Of immense overcoming. Immense hope. Especially in the light. Of so much bad news. Sin. And hate. And evil. That we experience. That pervades this world.

[14 : 31] Today. Again. We can think of places like. Ukraine. And Gaza. And Myanmar. Places where people. Are going through. The most dreadful. Kinds of. Suffering. And evil.

In this passage. From Acts. When the people. Realized that they'd. Actually crucified. The Messiah. They were cut to the heart. With remorse. Shame. Guilt. What shall we do?

They cried. Peter responded with. Repent. And be baptized. Every one of you. And literally they did. A thousand of them.

On that day. We just keep praying. Don't we? We just keep praying. That. That God in his power. And through the power. Of his Holy Spirit. Will sweep through. Our communities.

Our families. Our place of work. Our politics. Our nations. Our nations. That people's hearts. Will become. Tender. Softer.

[15 : 31] And they'll see. And realize. That there really is. Only one way. To respond. In the person of Jesus Christ. To repent. To change.

To be baptized. And be sponsored. And to follow him. While we still have. The opportunity. Every one of us. Amen.