

The Necessity of the Cross

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn now to Matthew's Gospel, Matthew chapter 16, and we're going to read from verse 13 to the end of the chapter. Matthew 16, reading from verse 13.

Now, when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others Jeremiah are one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter replied, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

[1 : 4 6] And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan.

You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man. Then Jesus told his disciples, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whoever would save his life, will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?

Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels, in the glory of his Father. And then he will repay each person, according to what he has done.

Truly I say to you, there are some standing here, who will not taste them, until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

[2 : 5 8] May God add his blessing to that reading, from his holy word. As we turn particularly to consider verse 21, we'll look at the whole passage that we read, or certainly great sections of it, but particularly focus on verse 21, where we read that from that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

It's the necessity, yes, the necessity of the cross. But of course, when we think of necessity, we think of what has to be, what has to happen, that great need, the must then of the cross.

It must happen. The must of the resurrection. The resurrection had to happen. And then as we read there from verse 24, the must of self-denial, when Jesus said, let him deny.

If anyone would come after me, let him. In other translations, we have the word must. He must deny himself. We'll come to see that particular section in a few moments.

But we think generally of the necessity of the cross. And all who were here this morning, those of you who were here this morning, you who are of the Lord's people, you remembered.

[4 : 25] You remembered the Lord's death. You remembered his death by us, we said, by word and by sacrament. The word was preached. The good news was proclaimed.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the sacrament, the signs of bread and wine were dispensed and they were received. And received as these visible reminders of the death of the Lord Jesus.

And so, this morning, as indeed on all occasions, in God's words proclaimed, Christ crucified was preached.

Christ crucified was remembered. And remembered, I pray with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving. But of course, while the cross is absolutely central to our preaching, to any preaching, and as the cross is absolutely central to anybody standing before our Lord and God, the cross wasn't where it ended for Jesus.

Yes, on the cross, Jesus bore our sins. He bore the sins of his people. And on that cross, Jesus gained the victory over sin. He gained the victory over Satan. The cross wasn't a place of defeat.

[5 : 42] It was the place of victory. And you and I stand awful in relation to the cross. But the cross can't be separated from what happened three days later.

Three days after Good Friday. Because three days later, as we know, after Jesus died and was buried, Jesus rose again. And the cross and the resurrection are absolutely, absolutely intricate, absolutely linked together, truly, completely.

And we have to say, no cross, no saviour. But of course, from Scripture, we also have to say, no cross, no resurrection. And if there's no resurrection, there's no life.

And if there's no life, there's no hope. And if there's no hope, then there's no purpose in any of our lives. And so it's that connection between the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

That's what I pray we'll be looking at this evening as, you know, as we exercise our hearts, our minds, our souls, as we, yes, as we return thanks to our Lord for the blessing of, the blessing of salvation, for the blessing of, of having participated in the Lord's Supper.

[6 : 59] or maybe it's a tradition that seems to be fading away, but it's important to return thanks even at a time such as this. Because we're going to hear Jesus speak to us, tell us of the necessity of the cross and at the same time the necessity of the resurrection and of our response to that cross and that resurrection of Jesus, that response being self-denial, taking our cross and following Jesus.

So let's turn more particularly to the passage that we began reading from in verse 13. And of course, when you see the word now, there's a link to what, something happened beforehand that leads on to what we read from verse 13.

Because where do we find Jesus and his disciples? They're in the north of the country. They're in Galilee. And of course, these disciples, they'd been with Jesus for his three years public ministry.

They'd followed their Lord, they'd followed their Master as Jesus preached, as he taught, as he performed miracles, as he showed the evidence of who he is as truly the Messiah, the Christ.

And as we read just before, before Jesus tells of his death and resurrection, we read Peter making that great confession. Peter, full of bravado, telling Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

[8 : 30] And Peter, no doubt, speaking not just on his own behalf, but on behalf even of other disciples as well. So far, so good as it were.

But then something happens that changes, that really challenges them. because they little expected the announcement that Jesus was about to give them. They little expected on the one hand, and yet, in many ways, they should have expected this.

They knew their Old Testament. They knew of the prophecies about the Messiah to come. They knew, or they knew from Scripture that the Messiah to come would be offered as the once-for-all sacrificial lamb.

They knew of the suffering servant that Isaiah prophesied about. They knew and would know the words, certainly in their own language, but they'd know the words concerning the one to come who would see the travail of the soul and be satisfied.

But at that point, the disciples hadn't grasped that as Messiah as the Christ, Jesus must suffer and he must die. At that point, that wasn't in their understanding of who Jesus was in his fullness and who he truly was.

[9 : 49] I mean, yes, in their estimation, the Messiah was someone who would be associated with glory and might, certainly in his life, greatness, triumph, but not humility, not death, not rejection by his own people.

So at that point, the disciples had no understanding that for Jesus, the Messiah, to know that triumph, he must first go the way of suffering.

He must go to the cross. And so, at this point, Jesus is moving his disciples in their understanding of who Jesus is.

And so he's going to explain to them the necessity, the must of his suffering, the must of the cross. And yet, when Jesus, you know, says that he's the fulfillment of that sacrificial lamb prophesied in the Old Testament, they just can't take this in.

I mean, what Jesus is telling them, that he must go to Jerusalem, that he must suffer at the hands of the religious authorities and be killed and three days later will be raised from the dead.

[11 : 02] I mean, all this just shocks the disciples. But it didn't shock Jesus. Because from all eternity, the divine Son of God had known that, yes, there would be a moment to come when he would come in human form.

and then he would come to give his life for others. And in his human form and his humanity, he must be the sinless sacrifice for others and do it on behalf of others.

And in his sinless humanity and his growing awareness and his humanity of what was about to happen, he comes to realize that he's now fully in the shadow of the cross.

and his face is set south, southwards to Jerusalem. And he knows there he's going to be tried. He knows he's going to be executed. He knows it's going to be in a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem.

And he knows it's there he's going to bear the sins of his people and three days later rise from the dead. He knows that all this must happen. And it's this must, this necessity, it's so important for us to grasp this aspect of must, the more you seek to understand who Jesus is.

[12 : 26] And the more you understand Jesus in the must of the cross, particularly, certainly for our first, in the first instance, the more I pray you'll come to love, the more the Lord Jesus, because you'll know what he did for you, he did out of your need, your need to be born again.

And so, let's look more closely then at the must of the cross as we read there in verse 21. For three years, three years, Jesus has preached the word.

He's given evidence of who he is by his word, by his miracles, by his healing, his teaching. He's proclaimed the good news about himself. He's called on people to repent of their sins.

The evidence has been there, the evidence of, there's so many miracles that Jesus performed some recorded in the scriptures, many not. But these miracles confirmed the word that Jesus proclaimed about himself.

But these three years must come to an end. They've got to come to a climax, because just as Jesus began his public ministry, that beginning presupposes an end.

[13 : 43] And that end will be the beginning of hope. Hope for you, hope for me, hope for the lost. And as the time of Jesus' crucifixion draws nearer and nearer, Jesus must let his disciples know what's about to happen to him.

And of course, as we read there, that knowledge concerns Jesus having to go to Jerusalem. again, think of this aspect of must.

You know, words, words are fascinating. I love looking at words, origins of words and so on, but words have power. Words have power in their meaning. And this word must, this word must, has so much power in its meaning.

You know, the must of going to Jerusalem. When Jesus says, you know, that he must go to Jerusalem, this word must, it speaks of what we call divine necessity.

In other words, there was no other way, no other way for sinners to be saved because God and man must be reconciled. Why? Well, think of Adam's disobedience, Adam in the Garden of Eden, his disobedience.

[14 : 58] He was man's representative and he sinned against God. He sinned against a holy God. And in that sinning, a breach was created and only another human being could fill that breach.

God had pronounced the penalty of death for man because of his sin there in Eden. It's that sin that we all have inherited, original sin.

But who could fill that breach between God and man? Who's going to pay that penalty, the ultimate penalty for sin on man's behalf? Who's going to pay so that the debts wiped out, paid in full?

Only a man who was sinless, only a true sinless man could satisfy God's righteous justice. Only a true human could pay the price fully for sin.

Because, and we say this carefully, but we say this in all reverence, because the same human nature, not this nature, not the same human, but the same human nature that sinned, should pay the price for sin.

[16 : 11] Of course, Jesus had that full human nature, of course, sin accepted. There was no other good enough to pay the price for sin. And so, yes, in his full humanity, he'll take our place on the cross.

And in his full divinity, because he is, as always, the divine son of God in his full divinity, he's got that power to bear the weight of God's wrath against sin.

So there was no other solution, no other way to solve man's deepest need. And the necessity of the cross means that, well, it meant that Jesus must die.

He must be killed, as he says here. His life must be taken as that price for sin. So you have the divine necessity. And that divine necessity means that the supreme act of sacrifice is going to take place.

That sacrifice that we remember this morning through the Lord's Supper by word and sacrament. But there's something, you know, you can't escape from when you think of the necessity of the cross, especially in your response.

[17 : 27] Because if the cross speaks of necessity, it must happen. The need for Jesus to die for sinners must happen. Then the necessity of the cross speaks to sinners.

You must be saved. You turn to the Savior. Give your life to him in full repentance of sins. Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus, you must be born again.

And how do you become born again? You're born again by faith in the one who died for sinners. So necessity is centered on the cross.

That necessity for Jesus to die and the necessity that must for you to be born again, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

But then as we've spoken of the must of the cross, there's the must of the resurrection. But what do they mean by the must of the resurrection? I mean, well, you know, we read verse 21.

[18 : 31] Let's read it this time with the word must included throughout the full meaning of the passage. From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and must suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes and must be killed and on the third day must be raised.

It's all altogether in that sense of must. Because Jesus knew that his death wasn't the end. I mean, certainly those who put him to death thought that that was the end, that was the end of that Jewish upstart.

But Jesus had full trust in his father's care. Jesus would face the wrath of his father and he'd do it in bearing the sins of many. As you know, when Jesus gave his life, when he, in fact, was about to die, as we read this morning, he entrusted his soul into his father's keeping, awaiting that moment.

Three days later, when Jesus' soul and body would be reunited in his resurrection. And you see the absolute confidence that Jesus has that he will be raised from the dead.

You know, he says, you know, and be killed on his third day, be raised. Be raised. Again, looking at the language here, the words used, what we call a passive tense.

[20 : 04] In other words, something else is going to do the action on behalf of, well, in this case, on behalf of Jesus. The action of raising Jesus from the dead is going to be done by another.

Now, who has that power to raise from the dead? Only God has that power to raise from the dead and only divine power could perform such a miracle. That's what the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 8 11.

He tells us that it was the Holy Spirit, God the Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead. We'll come back to that in a moment. But we do have to explore a little more the must of the resurrection of Jesus.

We were looking at the passage in the beginning of 1 Corinthians this morning, 1 Corinthians 15, when we consider the connection between, yes, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That great passage in 1 Corinthians 15 that really explores the whole subject of Jesus' resurrection. But Paul, you know, in that chapter gives the most wonderful defense of the truth of the resurrection of Jesus.

[21 : 14] And particularly when we think of the necessity of the resurrection, we don't need to look at the exact passages now, but look at verses 14 to 19.

Paul summarizes a number of reasons, I find six reasons, why the resurrection of Jesus is a must, is an absolute necessity. I'll just summarize the reasons.

If Jesus hadn't been raised, then our preaching's in vain. And if Jesus hadn't been raised, then faith is vain. And if Jesus hadn't been raised, then Paul and every other preacher misrepresented God, because we've declared that God raised Jesus from the dead.

And if Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead, you're still in your sins. And if Jesus hadn't been raised, then those who died before us, those who've died in Christ, perish.

And as he concludes in that little section of 1 Corinthians 15, if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[22 : 24] But Jesus must be raised to new life. I mean, if Jesus is still in his grave, then every single preacher of the gospel would have just been telling lies about Jesus.

I mean, if Jesus hadn't been raised from the dead, you can't say, I believe in Jesus, I follow my saviour, if Jesus is still dead. I mean, you can't serve a risen saviour if the saviour hasn't risen, hasn't risen from the grave.

I mean, if Jesus is still dead, where's your hope of salvation? Where's your hope of new life in Christ? If Jesus himself has no life.

You see, your faith, my faith, rests on the risen, living saviour. He's gone before you. He's prepared the way for you to receive eternal life.

He's risen from the dead, and that rising from the dead, his rising, has been raised from the dead, guarantees your resurrection in that last day. So it's the must of resurrection.

[23 : 31] Jesus must rise to give you that eternal hope of life in him. and we mentioned Romans 8 just a moment ago, we see that truth confirmed in that great passage of the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.

He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you. Read that passage when you get back home, Romans 8, 11, and let's just summarise it as simply as we can.

The same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will raise you in whom the spirit dwells. Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

The same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will raise you from the dead. But we can also say this, the same Holy Spirit who brought you from death to life is the same Holy Spirit who gives life to your bodies and will give life to your bodies on that day of resurrection.

That day when the risen, ascended Lord Jesus returns. And so the must of resurrection tells of future glory. That prospect that you have even now of future glory.

[24 : 54] But remember this, it's a present hope that you have. You who know him as Lord and Saviour, you who know Jesus as Lord and Saviour, you in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, you have that guarantee of eternal life.

Why? Because of the resurrection of Jesus. And so yes, you can truly say that you share in the resurrection of Jesus. And before we come to this whole matter of the must of self-denial, again I have to ask you, what's your response to all this?

The first two musts, the must of the cross and the must of the resurrection. What's your response? Is it faith? Is it absolute faith? Are you trusting in the promises of God for your salvation because Jesus died on the cross, because he was raised from the dead?

Or do you side with Peter at this, that point in his life that we read of there in Matthew 16? Remember, when Peter thought he knew better than Jesus, when Peter said, far be it from you Lord, this shall never happen to you when Jesus told him of his imminent death.

Peter had that human sense of thinking that it wouldn't at that point anyway accept the word of Jesus, because the word of Jesus at that point seemed to contradict Jesus as Messiah, and Peter at that point just couldn't accept the authority of Jesus.

[26 : 26] Now Paul Peter, maybe you can't see the necessity of the cross, maybe you can't accept that Jesus had to die for sinners, maybe you just see Jesus as a victim rather than the victor who gave his life because of his great love for you, for sinners.

Maybe you side with those who say that the resurrection wasn't physical but some kind of spiritual reawakening, merely a conjuring trick with bones as one famous bishop once declared.

Maybe you, like Peter, you prefer a sort of limited human-centered reason about Jesus rather than seeking the mind of God in relation to the work of Jesus.

And if you've got doubts about the necessity of the cross, the necessity of the resurrection, Jesus will rebuke you. He rebuke Peter, Peter whom he loved, he rebuked.

But for those who truly do believe by faith that the cross was necessary and that the resurrection of Jesus was necessary, you won't hear the rebuke of Jesus, but you'll hear the comforting words of Jesus towards you.

[27 : 43] He'll tell of his love for you. It's that love that calls you to be like Christ, that love that calls you to follow him, that love that calls you to go in that road of self-denial, just as Jesus said to his disciples after he rebuked Peter for Peter's denial, because this is the final part, the must of self-denial.

You see, there's another necessity associated with the cross. Jesus tells us that after Peter had expressed the shock of what Jesus said.

Jesus says to his disciples, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Let him, it's an imperative, it's a command, it's got this meaning, again, it's this meaning of must, other translations.

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. So if Jesus denied himself by taking up his cross and dying on that cross for sinners, sinners who know the Lord Jesus as Savior, you must, I must take up our lesser crosses and deny ourselves and follow the one who goes before you.

As we said, it's a command, let him deny himself, it's a command, it's a must, it's a call to self-denial in a world that seems to run away from any sense of self-denial and sacrifice.

[29 : 14] I mean, these 11 faithful disciples who remained with Jesus after Jesus' ascension, they would learn self-denial.

As apostles, they would follow Jesus, they would bear their crosses. They served Jesus in humility and service. They faced persecution, they faced opposition, and many of them, we believe, suffered death for the Savior.

their self-denial was going to be learned. What about you? Are you following in the footsteps, in many ways, following in their footsteps, even denying yourself when you take up your cross and witness to the Savior?

You lose your life in order to save it. It's what Jesus said, whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world?

Forfeits his life. What shall a man give and return for his life? What's Jesus saying here? He's speaking on that losing of self, that denial of self.

[30 : 22] He's thinking of self as of nothing, but that means gain. That denying of self, denying self for the one who gave himself for you.

That's no loss. That's the greatest gain of all. Come to him, come to the one who died and rose again and rose again for you. And follow the one who calls you to himself.

And you'll know that victory in your life. Yes, you'll live under the shadow of the cross. And you'll live and you'll live for your savior. Because he's given you not just that promise, but the reality of life eternal to all who are his.

Even you who know him as lord and savior who died on the cross and was raised to life, even life everlasting.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, you teach us much. You give us much to ponder, to meditate upon, and to give thanks for.

[31 : 29] even as we've been led this evening to consider the necessity of the cross, the necessity of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and the necessity of denying ourselves.

Lord, hear us as we cry to you for strength, for enabling to live these lives of self-denial so that you might be glorified.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.