

Damnation taken Lovingly

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Preacher: Rev Hugh Ferrier

[0 : 00] Brothers, sisters and friends, a joy to worship the Lord once more. A special welcome, of course, this evening to our brother and friend, the Reverend Hugh Ferrier. We thank him for his service coming all the way to our talks this evening to assist us.

We look forward to hearing the word preached. What our intimation, God willing, after the service, there's a fellowship in the manse. The food's prepared. There might be some ministers there.

I don't know if that's attraction or not, but if there's food, it's all good to go. So please come and at least eat some of that food for us. It saves us having to scoff it over the next few days. But please, joking aside, please come to the manse.

If you haven't come to a fellowship before, it's often hard to come to things for the first time. Trust me, I know. Please do come. We'd love to see you and you're more than welcome.

Of course, also the session is open and would be overjoyed to meet with those belonging to the congregation who wish the first time, or perhaps after some time, to declare and proclaim their love of their Saviour.

[1 : 06] That being said, now over to everyone here. Thank you, Donald. And again, a very warm welcome to you to our service of worship this evening. It really is lovely to be with you.

This is a congregation where I've had very enjoyable times with many of you under the previous minister's ministry. And with Donald now, it's lovely to be with you.

And lovely to see the Reverend Murdo McLeod-Mudd with us tonight as well. So I'm sure it's a relief to you all that he has made it across the mince and even better to see his better half with him.

It's lovely to have the McLeods with us. And we do pray that you would be blessed and a blessing over this weekend. Let's hear our call to worship. We read these words in Revelation chapter 5.

Then I looked and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders, the voice of many angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing.

[2 : 13] And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them saying to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, Be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever.

And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped. Wonderful picture of the praise, the magnification of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven.

And our prayer this evening is that as we gather like this tonight, that we would be able to reflect something of that heavenly worship, even as we worship together in this way.

Our opening item of praise is from the Singed Psalms, Psalm 65, verses 1 down to 8. That's on page 82 if you're using the psalm books. Psalm 65, verses 1 down to 8.

In Zion, praise awaits you, Lord. To you our vows will pay. To you all people will come near. You hear us when we pray. If you're able to stand for this singing, please do so.

[3 : 13] Psalm 65, verses 1 down to 8. Psalm 65, verses 1 down to 8. In Zion, praise awaits you, Lord.

To you our vows will pay. To you all people will come near.

To you all people will come near. You hear us when we pray.

When we pray. When we pray. When we pray. Overwhelmed thy sins.

And guilt upon us may. You pardoned all.

[4 : 20] God bless them. God bless theämma. It went undisended. Our blesses and washed our guilt away.

How blessed are those you choose and bring.

within your courts of grace. We're filled with blessings and your house, and your most holy grace.

With awesome deeds of righteousness you answered us, O God, our Saviour, hope of our the seas and all the earth abroad.

For strength and power form the hills, pure as the ocean's voice, pure as the earth.

[6 : 15] And all fair waves and sphere the people's noise.

In happy distant lands, with all record your ways, where morning dawns and evening fades, hear the Lord's sound of grace.

Well, let's draw you to the same God in prayer. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father and Eternal God, we come into your presence this evening, and we do so reminded in your word, reminded in the words that we have just sung together, that you are a God who is worthy of praise.

from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, you are the God who calls forth worship. And we thank you and bless you, not only for the fact that you are worthy of worship, but for the very fact that you command and demand such worship.

You leave men and women in absolutely no doubt as to how you are to be related to, how you are to be engaged with. that men and women do not come before you on equal terms, but rather they come as subjects before the one who is sovereign, the one who is lifted up, the one who is King of Kings, the one who is Lord of Lords, the one who is altogether worthy.

[8 : 09] And we thank you and we bless you this evening for the great reminders that we have been given in this psalm of why we ought to worship. We have been reminded in this psalm that you are a God who is great.

We have been reminded of your greatness and how you can still the voices of the people and you're the God who can calm the tumult of the waves.

We see so much going on in the world that is out with our control and out with our comprehension. We see the natural elements that we are so often subject to, how we can even find ourselves at times reliant on the weather to get to and from this island.

And yet even the wind and the waves are under your control and under your direction. We see the political situation around us. We see things going on in our country, things going on throughout Europe, things going on across the world, things that can worry us, things that can unsettle us, things that can leave us wondering what the way forward actually is.

And yet we praise and bless you that you are the God who is sovereign over the nations, the God who can set up kings and rulers and the God who can depose them in an instant. And we praise and we bless you for that great reminder this evening of your greatness.

[9 : 25] But we thank you and bless you not only for the reminder of your greatness from this psalm, but also the reminder of your grace. For the fact that the psalmist felt overwhelmed with sin, overwhelmed with guilt, recognizing that he was unfit and unworthy to approach you, to draw near to you, to relate to you in any way that would benefit him.

And yet we thank you and bless you for the fact that you spoke to the psalmist and showed the psalmist that you are a God rich in grace, rich in mercy, the fact that you are the one who pardoned all his guilt, all his iniquity, that you lifted it away as it were.

And we thank you and bless you that you are that unchanging God, the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever, and that we come into your presence this evening, rejoicing in the fullness of your grace as it is found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, that lamb who was slain, as we read about in our call to worship.

We thank you and bless you that he is the one who came into the world to seek and to save the lost and to do so as the lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world, lifting away the sin of his people as far as east is from the west, that he is the one who took the sin of his people onto his own broad and strong shoulders and carried that all the way to death, even death on the cross, and that through him we are assured, we are promised, that there is absolutely no condemnation for your people.

We thank you and bless you that because of this, we can say that there will not only be no condemnation for your people, but no separation from the love of God in Christ for your people.

[11 : 08] And we do thank you and bless you for this opportunity that we have at the beginning of another communion weekend to reflect on those glorious gospel truths. And we do pray that this evening as we gather to worship that we would be very conscious of your presence in our midst.

Our desire is to be here not simply out of ritual or out of habit, but rather our desire is to meet with and do business with our God, to meet with and to be ministered to by our God through your word and through your spirit.

And so we pray that this evening you might meet with us and might meet with us in a gracious manner. And we pray that this whole service would be God glorifying, would be centered on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, would be driven and directed by your living and life-giving word that is described as being sharper than any two-edged sword.

And that this service would be spirit-empowered, that your spirit might move in this place tonight where those who are perhaps still outside of Christ would find themselves sovereignly, effectually and irresistibly drawn to him.

And that those who are in Christ, those who have found him to be their refuge and resting place, would find their hearts warmed afresh and find him to be increasingly lovely.

[12 : 30] So bless us, we pray. Forgive all our sin and cleanse us in that precious blood as we pray these things in Jesus' name and for his sake and glory. Amen.

Well, we're going to sing again to the Lord's praise. This time in the words of Psalm 103. Psalm 103. That's the Scottish Salter version this time on page 369 if you're using the psalm books.

Psalm 103. And singing verses 8 down to 12. These great gospel promises that remind us of who our God is and what our God does.

A reminder that he is the one merciful, that he is the one who is gracious, the one who is long-suffering, slow to wrath, plenteous in mercy. That's who he is.

But we're also reminded in the psalm of what he does, that he removes in his love the iniquities, the sins of his people as far as east is from the west. Great gospel truths to remind ourselves of at a communion weekend.

[13 : 35] So once again, if you're able to stand for this singing, please do so. Psalm 103 verses 8 down to 12. The Lord of God is merciful, and he is gracious, long-suffering, and slow to wrath, in mercy plenteous.

He will not chide continually, nor keep his anger still.

With us he dealt, nor as we sinned, nor did we hide the veil, for us he is.

Than in its height, the earth surmounted far, so great to those that do him feel.

His love and he is. Your love is clear, every forty seven systems of life.

[15 : 47] He is distant from the rest of the body.

Rav us remove his love all our iniquity.

I'm going to read from the Word of God. It's taken from the Gospel of Mark. Mark's Gospel in chapter 15. Mark chapter 15, and we'll read verses 33 down to 41.

Mark chapter 15 from verse 33. Worried, and when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Elwi, Elwi, Lemes Abachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, Behold, he is calling Elijah.

[17 : 12] And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.

And there were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and the younger, and of Joseph and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him.

And there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. Amen. This is the word of God to us this evening. Let's once again come before him in prayer.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you and we bless you this evening for that great reminder that we have been given in the psalm that we have just sung together, that you are merciful, you are gracious, you are slow to anger, you are abounding in steadfast love.

[18 : 22] Words that encouraged your saints so often as we read your word. Words that encouraged Moses. Words that encouraged David. Words that even encouraged the likes of Jonah when he was so far from you.

And we thank you and bless you that you are the unchanging one. And as we reflect on your unchanging nature, we thank you for the encouragement that it gives us as we approach you in prayer, as we bring our petitions, as we bring our requests before your throne of grace, requesting grace to help in our own time of need.

We come before you this evening remembering this congregation and another communion weekend. We thank you for this congregation. We thank you for their ministry. We thank you for Donald and for all that he has done so far in the last year and a half and all that he is continuing to do for your honour and your glory here in this part of your vineyard.

We pray for him, that you would encourage him, that you would strengthen him, that you would sustain him, that day by day, week by week, and month by month, he would find and know your grace to be all sufficient.

And even in the moments when he is conscious of his own weakness, perhaps his limitation, that he would know your power being perfected in that weakness and in that limitation.

[19 : 45] We remember the Kirk session, the deacon's court. We pray for them as they endeavour to lead the congregation and serve the congregation. Bless them in all the decisions that they make, all the discussion that they have.

And our prayer is that everything would be done to your praise, honour and glory. Bless all in the congregation. Bless those who are members of the congregation and those who support the congregation through their attendance and through other means.

And we do pray, O Lord, that over this weekend, they would be very conscious of your presence being in their midst, of your hand being upon them for good, of your favour and of your grace.

We thank you for the Reverend Myrtle coming and we thank you for the travelling mercies that you have given him, that you have brought him here today. We thank you and bless you for his ministry over these years and all that he has done and all that he continues to do there.

We thank you for the encouragements that he and Maggie have seen in these years. And we do pray for them there and we pray that day by day they would be very conscious of your face being turned toward them for good.

[20 : 51] And our prayer is that over this weekend, he would know liberty, he would know unction from your own spirit, that he would know your smile being upon him, that he would know your presence, your protection, your peace, your power, your promises, as he heralds the unsearchable riches of your grace.

And we pray, O Lord, that this congregation and indeed Donald and Murdo and all who are at these services would be able to look back in weeks, months, possibly even years to come, and be able to say that the Lord was there.

We pray, O Lord, that you would bless all the congregations having communion weekends over this communion season. We think of the Shabbos and North Uist congregation this weekend too.

And we pray that you would bless them and encourage them. And we do pray for the Shabbos congregation in their vacancy, asking that you would lead them to a man of your choosing and that they would be very conscious of your leading, your shepherding, and your guiding and directing through this time.

And we thank you for the North Uist congregation getting ready to enjoy a settled ministry. We thank you for David Ferguson. We thank you for your work of grace in his life, for the way that you have kept him and sustained him.

[22 : 04] We pray, O Lord, that he would know great encouragement and that he might see fruit for his labor there in North Uist. We pray, O Lord, that he would be very conscious of your presence with him in a place and in an environment that can be challenging and that can feel isolated at times.

We pray, O Lord, for all those in this congregation now who need you in particular ways, maybe who are going through so many things that even the prospect of sitting under your word might seem to be a hard thing to do.

We pray for those who are sick, those who are suffering, those who are struggling, maybe those who are going through times of bereavement. We pray, O Lord, that you would meet them, that you would minister to them, that you would give them that grace to draw near to you with the full assurance that you have promised that those who draw near to you, you will draw near to them and that you will carry them.

We thank you that you tell us so often in your word of the way that you do carry your people, that you carry them like a shepherd, carry salams close to his bosom, that you carry them through every experience, every providence, both in their youth and the womb, but also in their old age and their grey hairs.

We pray, O Lord, that you would bless each and every one of us as we come to focus on your word together. Our prayer is that it would be a word in season for every single one of us, that you would open our eyes to see, that you would open our ears to hear, that you would open our minds to understand, that you would open our hearts to receive and believe, and that through this, our lips would be open that we might confess together that Jesus Christ is Lord, and not just Lord, but our Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[23 : 48] And so we commit all these things that we prayed about into your hands now, rejoicing that you hear us, not because we are worthy, not because we're deserving, but because we simply pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, before we focus on the word of God together, we'll again sing this time in the words of Psalm 119. Sing Psalm's version on page 165 of the Psalm books, and verses 129 to 136, which is our prayer as we come to focus on the Lord's word together.

Your statutes, Lord, are wonderful, so I obey them from my heart. Your words as they unfold give light, and truth to simple minds impart. And especially verse 133.

Direct my footsteps in your word, let sin not hold me in its sway. From man's oppression set me free, that your commands I may obey. As we sing this psalm, friends, we're singing, we are praying together that the Lord would indeed be directing us in his word.

So, if you're able to stand for this singing, please do so. Psalm 119, verses 129 to 136. Psalm 119, Psalm 119, Psalm 119, Amen.

[25 : 14] sheck ■zn joka Cad■ O dear I have to do To simple minds impart With open mouth I pound I pound You know, that will pass you While away Look at this Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

In his book, The God of All Grace, Douglas Macmillan writes this, Calvary is a strangely attractive place. It is attractive to both the Christian and to the non-Christian.

[28 : 33] I remember in my own unconverted days how a sermon on Calvary would hold my attention as no other sermon would do. I used to wonder what the whole theme was about, Jesus, such a good man.

And yet men, men like ourselves took this good man, Jesus, and they led him outside the city of Jerusalem and there they crucified him. What was it all about?

Calvary, a strangely attractive place. And yet it's also a somewhat repellent place. I was having a conversation with one of our older members not so very long ago, and it was one of those conversations that really remind you of the great privilege of being a pastor.

This older woman was speaking about her own mother and how her mother had found it very hard to hear sermons about Calvary. She had found it hard to read about Calvary.

Everything about Calvary was so distressing and somewhat repellent to this woman. This evening, I want us to spend just a few moments at this place called Calvary as we prepare to come to the Lord's table in the next few days.

[29 : 46] And as we do so, we look at these verses under three headings. We're going to look at the dereliction, then the division, and finally the devotion. The dereliction, the division, and the devotion.

First, we have the dereliction, and you see that in verse 33 to 36, where Mark focuses on Jesus' cry of dereliction. In verse 33, we see the darkness.

We can start by reflecting on what has happened. Jesus has been betrayed and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He has been brought before the Jewish leaders who have falsely accused him and declared that he is deserving of death.

He has been delivered up to the Roman governor, who has had him scourged and then handed him over to be crucified. And finally, he's been nailed to a wooden cross outside the walls of Jerusalem between two criminals.

And we see what happens next in verse 33. Mark has already told us that Jesus was crucified at the third hour. That's 9am. And he now tells us that it was the sixth hour.

[30 : 52] That's 12pm. Jesus has been hanging on the cross for the best part of three hours. And at the sixth hour, darkness comes over the whole land.

This isn't the natural darkness of an eclipse or a sandstorm. This is a supernatural darkness. This is the darkness of divine displeasure.

This is the darkness of divine judgment. This is the imposition of God's judgment being meted out on Jesus, who has become the sin bearer, become the sacrifice for his people.

R.C. Sproul expresses it vividly when he writes this. God is too holy to look at sin. He could not bear to look at that concentrated monumental condensation of evil.

And so he averted his eyes from his son. The light of his countenance was turned off. All blessedness was removed from the son whom he loved. And in its place was the full measure of the divine curse.

[31 : 57] God adds to these details astronomical signs. What an image that as the father pours out his judgment on the son.

As the father concentrates his displeasure on his son. The son in the heavens ceases to give off any light.

And this dreadful darkness remains for three hours, Mark writes, until the ninth hour, 3pm. We move from the darkness to the dereliction in verse 34 to 36.

And Mark records what Jesus did. Look at verse 34. At the ninth hour, he cries out with a loud voice. It's all become too much for him. And he now vocalizes his feelings.

And Mark goes on to record what Jesus said. Look again at verse 34. The words that he speaks are Aramaic. Eloi, Eloi. Lema sabachthani.

[33 : 12] And Mark provides the translation for the Roman readers of his gospel. As he says that this means, my God, my God. Why have you forsaken me? It's a horrific cry.

It's the cry of a soul in torment. Throughout his life, Jesus had always been conscious of his father's love. His father's approval. You remember those moments when he's been baptized.

And the father says, this is my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased. Or you remember how at his transfiguration, the father pulls back the curtain of heaven, as it were.

And says, this is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him. But in these hours of darkness, Jesus has no sense of this. He has no awareness of this.

Jesus finds himself forsaken by his father as the waves of God's holy and just wrath against sin come crashing against him, the sin bearer.

[34 : 14] He is no longer able to address his father as Abba. As he had always prayed and taught the disciples to pray. Instead, all he can say is, my God, my God.

Why have you forsaken me? And Mark goes further and records how the bystanders responded. Look at verse 35 and 36. As they hear Jesus' words, some of them think that he's calling out for Elijah.

There was a widespread Jewish belief that the prophet Elijah would return. And that he would rescue the righteous in their hour of need. Their hour of disaster.

Their hour of suffering. And as the bystanders hear Jesus crying out, Eloi, Eloi, my God, my God. Some of them think that he's actually crying out, Elijah, Elijah.

And upon hearing this, someone goes, fills a sponge with sour wine, puts it on a reed and gives it to Jesus to drink. And as they do so, they say, wait.

[35 : 17] Let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. Now, I know that many of us will have been at deathbeds over the years. And we'll have seen how even a small sip of water will give that dying person a small measure of relief.

Just for those few moments. But this giving sour wine to Jesus in his dying moments is no act of kindness. It's a cruel test where the bystanders are wanting to keep Jesus alive.

Prolong his suffering. Prolong his agony. Just to see if Elijah will come. Just to see if Elijah will rescue this man.

Now, friends, as we consider these verses, we can see what Jesus suffered for his people. What Jesus suffered for his people. That's what we see here in Mark 15.

Here we find a Jesus who has been scourged. And spat upon. And stripped. Been enveloped in the darkness of divine displeasure.

[36 : 24] Here we find a Jesus who has been crucified. And subjected to contempt and cruel taunts. Experiencing the imposition of God's judgment.

Here we find Jesus bearing the sin of his people. And becoming aware of a breach in his communion. His fellowship with his father. As he cries out, my God, my God.

Why have you forsaken me? Tim Trumper calls this the cry of hell. As Jesus bears the full weight of the wrath of God.

And that's worth our attention tonight, friends. The judgment of God. The damnation of God. The hell of God fell on the head of Jesus.

So that it will never fall on the heads of those who belong to Jesus. Jesus endured the darkness of God's holy wrath. So that his people will never have to enter or endure that darkness.

[37 : 33] Jesus cried out, my God, my God. Why have you forsaken me? So that his people will never have to cry it. Either in this life or in the life to come.

There's a story about Professor John Duncan concerning these words. Professor John Duncan, as some of you know, was a professor in the Free Church College in the 19th century.

He was a deeply devout man. A man very famous for his close walk with the Lord. And on one occasion he was lecturing on these words. My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?

And here's how one of his students described the incident. Duncan said, Aye, aye, do you know what it was? Dying on the cross, forsaken by his father.

Do you know what it was? What, what? It was damnation. And damnation taken lovingly. And he subsided into his chair, leaning a little to one side.

[38 : 34] His head very straight and stiff. His arms hanging down on either side beyond the arms of the chair. With the light beaming from his face and the tears trickling down his cheeks.

And he repeated in a low intense voice that broke into half a laugh, half a sob. It was damnation. And damnation taken lovingly.

My friend, are you sorrowful? Yet also rejoicing this communion weekend. As you consider what Jesus suffered for his people.

Because you have come to the place. You have come to the point of realizing that he suffered all of this. For you. For you.

For you. Damnation taken lovingly. For you. What a thought. But then we come to the division.

[39 : 39] Look at verses 37 to 39. Where Mark focuses on the division of the temple curtain. Verses 37 and 38. We see the actual division of the curtain. Mark tells us that Jesus uttered a loud cry.

And breathed his last. Verse 37. Now this is remarkable. This is something that shouldn't be overlooked. A crucifixion was a slow death. An agonizing death.

It involved suffocation. Loss of bodily fluid. Multiple organ failure. A crucified victim would die with barely a whisper on their lips. Normally just a death rattle.

But Jesus dies differently. Jesus dies with a loud cry on his lips. And after uttering this cry. Mark says he breathed his last.

And after Jesus breathes his last. Another supernatural event takes place. Look at verse 38. We read that the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

[40 : 42] This was the thick curtain. The heavy curtain. That separated the holy place from the most holy place in the Jerusalem temple. The most holy place in the Jerusalem temple was the place that only the high priest could enter once a year.

The place where the presence of God was said to be found. That curtain symbolized and it shouted to everyone who saw it that access into the most holy place.

Access into the presence of God was off limits. It wasn't possible. It wasn't permitted. And now this curtain has been supernaturally torn in two from top to bottom.

It's as if God has come. It's as if God has taken the curtain in both his hands. It's as if God has ripped that curtain apart. Shouting to everyone that access into his presence is no longer prohibited.

It's no longer prevented. But rather it is permitted because and through the death of Christ. We move from the division of that curtain to the declaration of the centurion.

[41 : 57] Look at verse 39. Mark tells us that a centurion was present beginning of verse 39. This man would have been in command of a hundred soldiers. He was responsible for the whole execution process.

And he's now standing, Mark says. And he's facing Jesus. And he sees the way in which Jesus breathed his last. And Mark tells us what this man said. Look again at verse 39.

He exclaims, Truly this man was the Son of God. Now this man's a Roman. This man is a Gentile. This man isn't Jewish.

Furthermore, this man is a centurion who had become hardened and accustomed to supervising the execution process on a regular basis. But when he sees the manner in which Jesus dies, the manner in which Jesus breathes his last, he recognizes that he has been standing before a unique figure.

Unparalleled, unprecedented figure. Standing before a divine being. Unparalleled, unprecedented figure. And all he can say is, truly this man was the Son of God.

[43 : 09] And in many ways, friends, this is the climax of Mark's narrative about Jesus. In Mark chapter 1, Mark opens his account of Jesus' life by declaring Jesus to be the Son of God.

And now Mark brings his account of Jesus' life to a close by recording a Roman centurion. Yes, a Roman centurion of all people declaring Jesus to be the Son of God.

That's what Mark is wanting to impress upon the readers of his gospel. He is saying to them, don't think for one moment that this Jesus who I've been writing about was merely a good man.

Don't think for one moment that this Jesus whom I've been writing about was merely a great man. This Jesus whom I have been writing about was and is the God-man.

And so, friends, as we consider these verses, we can see not just what Jesus suffered for his people, but what Jesus secured for his people. That's what we see here in Mark 15.

[44 : 17] Jesus, the sin-baring Savior, dies. And as he dies, that temple curtain symbolizing man's restricted access to God is torn in two.

The death of Jesus has secured unique, unprecedented, and paralleled access into the presence of God for all his people.

Francis Schaeffer put it this way. The central message of biblical Christianity is the possibility of men and women approaching God through the work of Christ.

That's the central message of biblical Christianity. And that, friends, is worth our attention tonight. Isn't it an incredible thought? The access into a holy God's presence has been opened up through Jesus' death.

Signaled, symbolized, in the tearing of the temple curtain. Jeff Thomas tells a personal story to illustrate this very profound truth.

[45 : 27] Here's what he says. When I was a boy, I would go with my father to where he worked. He was the station master of two country railway stations, and he would walk between the two on the railway line itself, our footsteps matching the regular sleepers.

And we would pass every warning notice, trespassers will be prosecuted. Without a second glance, because my father was in charge of this section of the line, he was taking me with him.

And he had the authority to do so. So it is when we put our hand into the hand of Christ and follow him. We are not trespassing when he takes us sinners through every door that would keep us right out of the presence of God to himself.

Whoever we are, Jesus' death is our all-sufficient plea. However great our sin, however poor and ignorant we are, the death of Christ is intrinsically adequate to meet all our needs and all the demands of God's holiness.

And so tonight, friends, there is a message. A word of invitation and a word of warning to every person as they consider this torn curtain.

[46 : 47] There is a word of invitation. The temple curtain restricting access to the presence of God has been torn in two. And because of this, we are invited to draw near to this God, friends, in a way that the Old Testament saints could only ever dream of.

The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes this as he says that we can draw near to God with boldness, with confidence, with full assurance. Why?

Because of Jesus. We can approach God without reserve, without restraint, without restriction because Jesus has opened up a new and living way for each and every one of his people.

What an invitation, friends. That we, we are invited to draw near to God because of the torn curtain. But there is also a word of warning.

The temple curtain restricting access to the presence of God has been torn in two. And it's important and it's imperative that we don't attempt to stitch it up again with all our man-made rules and traditions.

[47 : 59] Anytime we start telling ourselves that our salvation, our standing before God is based on something that we have done, something that we are doing, something that we hope to do in the future, we are attempting to sew up that curtain.

And anytime we tell someone else that their salvation, their standing before God is based on something that they have done, something that they are doing, something that they ought to do in the future, we are attempting to sew up that curtain.

Anytime we move away from a Jesus plus nothing gospel to a Jesus plus something gospel, we are attempting to repair what God has ripped apart.

Let me say that again. Anytime we move away from a Jesus plus nothing gospel to a Jesus plus something gospel, we are attempting to repair what God has ripped apart.

Jesus has secured full access to God, free access to God for all his people. And can I ask you this evening, are you approaching this God with boldness, with confidence, with full assurance, saying with the hymn writer, I need no other argument, I need no other plea.

[49 : 25] It is enough that Jesus died and that he died for me. It's all that's needed.

And then third and finally we have the devotion. Look at verse 40 and 41. Where Mark focuses now on the women's display of devotion.

The women's display of devotion. Mark notes who was present at the crucifixion. He starts by saying that women were there. Mark's already recorded the flight of Jesus' male disciples into the night.

And he's also recorded the cowardly denial of Jesus by Peter who had said that he would go to prison and even death with him. But these women, these female disciples are all present as Jesus breathes his last.

And Mark identifies some of the women who were present. We have Mary Magdalene. She was one of Jesus' most devoted followers. She'll be the first person whom the risen Jesus appears to.

[50 : 31] She was a woman from the fishing village of Magdala. A woman whom Jesus had cast out seven demons from. And she never lost sight of. She never forgot what Jesus had done for her.

We also have Mary, the mother of James and Joseph. And we don't know anything about this woman. All we know is that she was the mother of James and Joseph who were evidently well known to the Roman readers of Mark's Gospel.

And finally we have Salome. Some suggest that she was the wife of Zebedee, the mother of James and John. Others even put forward the proposal that she could have been a half-sister of Jesus.

But ultimately we don't know. All we know is that these women were there. And Mark notes what these women had done and what these women were doing.

He tells us what they had done. Look what it says. They had followed Jesus from the time when he was in Galilee. They had ministered to Jesus while he was in Galilee.

[51 : 34] And they along with many other women had come up with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. And then Mark tells us what these women were now doing.

They were looking on at Jesus. And all that was happening to him. These women will function as eyewitnesses to the death and burial of Jesus in the weeks that lie ahead.

But for now these women are just silent spectators. They're perplexed. They're puzzled. They're perturbed. But they are also present.

They have followed Jesus to what they believe at this moment in time is the bitter end. And so friends as we consider these verses we can see not just what Jesus suffered for his people.

Not just what Jesus secured for his people. But also what Jesus seeks from his people. That's what we see here in Mark 15. These are ordinary women.

[52 : 40] Who have followed Jesus in his life. And are continuing to follow him as he dies. They take what they think is their last opportunity just to be with Jesus.

And identify themselves with Jesus. Mark Strauss writes this. While Mark emphatically stated that at his arrest all of Jesus' disciples deserted him.

The women at the crucifixion remind us that devotion to Jesus is still alive. And that's worth our attention this evening.

These women are an example of the kind of devotion that Jesus seeks from his people. Jesus isn't seeking fair weather friends.

Who will follow him when everything is going well. When the sun is shining. And when the first cloud appears they'll disappear. That's not the kind of follower Jesus is seeking.

[53 : 48] Jesus is seeking people who will stay with him through thick and through thin. Even in the day of trouble. The day of trial. The day of tears. Jesus is seeking people who will remain committed to him.

Devoted to him. Even when their crisis comes. And their heads and their hearts are full with confusion. Over the years.

I've received a lot of grief. A lot of mockery from different people. Regarding what I believe to be the greatest film seen of all time. It comes from the 2007 adaptation of Jane Austen's novel Persuasion.

Captain Wentworth has written to Anne Elliot. And he has told her that she has pierced his soul. And that he is half in agony. He is half in hope.

He is now offering himself to her. And when Anne Elliot gets this letter from Captain Wentworth. She runs through the streets. And it's a brilliant scene. You might want to YouTube it later on.

[54 : 54] A brilliant scene. The music is playing. The piano is coming up to a crescendo. And she's running and running through the streets. And you can hear her heart pounding. She's gasping for breath as she seeks Captain Wentworth.

And when she finds him. She says to him. That she is in receipt of his proposal. And is minded to accept. I wonder if that's what Emma said to Donald. I am in receipt of your proposal.

And I am minded to accept. And he asks her if she is quite certain. And she replies I am. I am determined.

I will. And nothing you may be sure will ever persuade me otherwise. And I often think and I often say.

That it's such a helpful illustration. Of the kind of commitment. The kind of devotion. That Jesus is looking for. From his people. He is looking for people.

[55 : 57] Who will remain with him. Who will identify themselves. With him. On their very best days. But he is also looking for people.

Who will remain with him. Identify themselves. As followers of him. On their very. Worst days. This communion weekend friends.

We have. An opportunity. To publicly. Proclaim. Our commitment. Our devotion. To Jesus.

Just as these women. Publicly. Displayed. Their commitment. Their devotion. To Jesus. On the very. Darkest of days.

The most. Difficult of days. When. The opposition. Seemed to be very much. On the ascendancy.

[57 : 02] And I simply. Leave you tonight. With the. Encouragement. And I leave you. With the. Exhortation. To do so. Don't.

Hold. Back. Friend. From. Publicly. Displaying. Your commitment. Your. Devotion. To Jesus. Whether you're going.

Through a day of sunshine. Or a day. Of darkness. Happiness. Well. Let's conclude. By singing. To his praise.

The words. Of Psalm 40. That's the Scottish. Salter version. Page. 260. And we're going to. Sing. Verses. Six.

Down to ten. These words. Are almost. Messianic. And they're certainly. Used that way. By the writer. To the Hebrews. That speak of.

[57 : 57] Jesus. And his commitment. To doing his. Father's will. Saving. His people. No sacrifice. No offering. Didst thou. At all desire. Mine ears. Thou boardst.

And offering. Thou. And burnt. Didst not require. Then to the Lord. These were my words. I come. Behold. And see. Within the volume. Of the book. It written. Is. Of me. And down.

To verse ten. If you're able to. Stand for this singing. Please do so. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[60 : 22] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. to rest more fully in him, but also even the grace to publicly profess our love for him.

[62 : 59] And so we pray now that you would part us with your blessing, forgiving all our sin as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.