

The Weekend that Changed the World

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much. Okay, well, thanks for the invitation. I can't remember how I came up with the weekend that changed the world.

I think it was because of the time of year, as I thought about when I would be doing this. And in many traditions at the moment, this is Holy Week, as people move towards Good Friday, remembering the death of Jesus, and Easter Sunday, remembering the resurrection of Jesus.

So that's happening later this week. But also it's Holy Week and back. You understand that back is the centre of the universe, and we're having our communion this coming weekend.

So our thoughts are full of these themes as well, going back to, as I said, the weekend that changed the world, the weekend when Jesus died and rose again.

I was asking somebody the other day, when I said I'm going to talk about this in point, and I said, what would you say about this weekend that changed the world, somebody who's a Christian?

[1 : 14] What did it change for you? He said, well, the first thing I think of is my weekends. He said, it changed my weekends. And he described the kind of weekends that he used to have uptown, and the sort of headaches he used to have after his weekend.

And he said, the weekend that changed the world changed my world, as it changed my weekends. And life was very, very different. So my prayer is that as we think about the death and resurrection of Jesus, that we all might want to have that weekend of two millennia ago.

Change not only our weekends, but change our whole destiny for eternity. I want to use a particular image with you.

I was using it tonight in a different context and back, and I'll continue with it here with the poor souls who've heard me already and back. It's the image of theatre, of a play in acts and with scenes.

And I want to think about act one in terms of what happened on the Friday when Jesus died. And then act two in terms of what happened on the Sunday when he rose from the dead.

[2 : 36] And just to pick out, in each case, three scenes that together maybe sum up the import of the Friday and the import of the Sunday.

And then maybe one or two things in conclusion. So, act one on Friday. The Gospel of Luke, especially chapter 23, if you want to read that later on.

It tells a story that I'm going to tell. As we think about Friday, and as I said, what's often called Good Friday. We are maybe so used to hearing the story of Jesus and the cross that it doesn't strike us anymore as strange as it seems to people who hear it for the first time.

When people hear about this Jesus and the one who lived this most beautiful life that was ever lived. And then that Jesus is on that cross.

And you say when you hear the story, why him of all people? And why this being done to him of all things being done to him? It's all very strange.

[3 : 55] I wanted to read you a little thing written by a writer called Kathleen Norris. Who's going back to one of her earliest memories.

As a very little girl, she would go along to Sunday school for preschoolers. And she's talking here about a memory at home. She talks about the new things in the house.

The electric stove on which I promptly burned the palm of my right hand. The television. We've never had one before. There's a story on television today I like very much. Because it's the same story I've heard at Sunday school.

It's about Jesus. I love Jesus. And I love the songs we learn about Jesus. But this story is different from the one I've heard. He's nailed to a cross.

He's going to die. I've never seen a movie in which someone dies. And I don't like it. Especially Jesus. How can I sing about him anymore if he dies? I run into the kitchen where my grandmother is cleaning a fish.

[4 : 59] I'm in tears. And she says, it's Good Friday, she tells me. Good because it's the day Jesus died. Because he died to take away your sins. I don't know what this means. I'm transfixed by the fish's eye.

Something is wrong in this world. Very wrong. I go to my room. Climb inside my wardrobe. And shut the door. I'm going to stay in my wardrobe a long time.

I'm not going to come out of my wardrobe ever. The grown-ups have gone crazy. Or else they've lied to me. They've kept it hidden. What a terrible world this is.

A world where Jesus dies. Very little girl. So shocked the first time she realised that Jesus died on a cross.

The three scenes in Acts 1. Just touch on each of them very quickly. I'll take three times, okay? Nine o'clock in the morning.

[6 : 01] Twelve noon. And three o'clock in the afternoon. First of all, at nine o'clock in the morning, Jesus is nailed to the tree.

Jesus and two others who are going to be crucified in the party of soldiers come up to the hill Golgotha, the place of a skull, the place of death.

And Jesus is laid on top of it. The cross would be laid on the ground. And Jesus is laid on top of the cross. And nails are hammered into his hands and his feet.

And then the cross would be lifted up and dropped into a socket in the ground. And at that moment, most of the bones and the top half of the body would snap out of joint. Now, as Jesus is being nailed to the cross on the ground, the soldiers knew what would happen.

They knew that this person would scream at them. And spit at them. And swear at them. And blaspheme heaven.

[7 : 06] Because that's what everybody did when they were being nailed to a cross. But the soldiers today can't believe what they're hearing. As they nail Jesus, he keeps saying, Father, forgive them, for they don't realise what they're doing.

Father, forgive them, they don't realise what they're doing. Father, forgive them, over and over and over. He's praying for them as they nail them to the cross.

The soldiers would never have heard this kind of attitude before. And they would have been struck, surely, by the love of this person. And of course, that's the story of the cross, isn't it?

The ultimate love story. As the Son of God came from heaven in love for us. And in love was willing to be nailed to the cross.

That he might die for our salvation. You move to 12 noon. Suddenly everything goes dark. Darkness over the whole land for three hours.

[8 : 10] And out of that darkness, according to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, we hear Jesus crying, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

There's a black moment there in the history of the world that's reflective of the darkness around. There's a darkness in Jesus' own soul as he is carrying the sins of the world on his shoulders.

As we were thinking earlier in church, the Jesus who spoke about outer darkness, hell, is experiencing that darkness, that hell for us on the cross.

Jesus took hell on the cross in the darkness for our sins. I think that darkness definitely does speak of judgment. Throughout the Old Testament, darkness is often associated with God's judgment.

And here in this darkness, someone is being judged. If you remember the story of the plagues of Egypt, the second last plague is darkness. And the last plague is the death of the firstborn sons.

[9 : 23] And here on this cross, there's darkness and the death of the firstborn, as it were. But it's the death of Jesus for our sins.

It's the death of the only son who doesn't deserve to die for his own sins because he had none in the darkness, dying for our sins that we might be forgiven.

And then at three o'clock in the afternoon, we have Jesus saying from the cross, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Dying now in peace. The crisis is over. He's come through it. And he's dying in peace, speaking to his father. And I think it's very significant that he picks up in a prayer from one of the Psalms, Psalm 31 and verse 5, where the psalmist says, Into your hands I commit my spirit.

And what's really significant about that prayer is that mums taught that prayer to their children when they were very little as a night time prayer.

[10 : 36] The way that we teach our children or grandchildren a little prayer that's easy to remember and say at night. Or as they get a little older, Jesus' prayer is very like one that many of us know.

As I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Jesus, when he was a little boy, had been taught by his mother to say, before he went to sleep, Into your hands I commit my spirit.

Same sentiments as the prayer I've just said. And so isn't it significant that as Jesus dies, he utters a child's prayer, going to sleep, because Jesus is going to sleep on the cross in peace, having finished the work he was given to do and committing his spirit into the safekeeping of his father.

Now he dies in peace. So that's Act 1 and three of the scenes that take place on Friday. Now to come to Act 2 and what happens on Easter Sunday.

And just again to mention three things, but three places this time. A garden, a road, and a room. First of all, very early in the morning, really as it's going from darkness to light, at dawn, you see a group of women coming to the tomb, to the sepulchre.

[12 : 10] And they're talking about what they're going to do when they reach the tomb. They're saying, who's going to roll away the stone? They can't manage to roll away this huge stone from the entrance to the tomb.

But then when they get to the tomb, they find that the stone has been rolled away and there's nobody in the tomb. The tomb is empty. Angelic figures tell them that Jesus is risen.

And as they leave the tomb, we read in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus meets them and they fall down at his feet and worship him. And this is all happening very significantly and symbolically at dawn on the first day of the week.

Because here is a new sorry, a new era, a new world dawning. And as that day dawns, a new epoch in the history of the world begins.

And on that first, first day of the week, Jesus rises from the dead. The tomb is empty, he meets these women and they are convinced that Jesus has risen physically from the dead.

[13 : 26] The second scene on that first day is on a road later on as two people, two disciples are walking away from Jerusalem to a place called Emmaus, a few miles outside Jerusalem.

And they're talking about what's happened over these past days, day or two, and they're distressed and troubled and confused. They're saying, we thought Jesus was going to be the Messiah, the Christ who would release us from all the problems we've been having, and he's dead and they don't know why exactly this has all happened.

And a figure comes alongside them and walks with them and we're told in the Bible that they are kept for the moment from realising that it's Jesus. And he asks them why they're so sad and they tell him and he talks with them about the Bible.

Then eventually they say to him when they reach their home, come in with us and they sit at table. He's their guest. And then as he breaks bread at the beginning of the meal, their eyes are opened and they realise it's Jesus.

And then he vanishes from their sight. And I think the simple explanation is the best one there, that they recognised Jesus as he broke the bread and they saw the nail marks in his hands.

[14 : 53] Maybe he also had a characteristic way of breaking the bread, but a characteristic prayer that he said over the bread. But at that moment, as they see his hands and hear his voice, their eyes are opened and they realise it's Jesus who's been speaking to them.

And then they realise why their hearts were burning when he was talking to them on the road and opening the Bible to them. Because Jesus was showing them himself in what we call the Old Testament.

I would have loved of all the sermons in history, of all the Bible studies in history, to have heard that Bible study from Jesus showing how he is right through the Old Testament scriptures.

And as he opened the scriptures to them, their hearts burned and they were so amazed at the insight of this stranger into the Bible.

Then the third scene on Sunday is a room back in Jerusalem, the upper room. And the disciples are there, we know from John's gospel, that they are behind locked doors.

[16 : 04] They don't believe the women's story about the tomb. And they're behind locked doors for fear that they might be the next. You know, even still today, when you hear of a government, a repressive government, dealing with some rebel group, they'll get the leader and execute him and then they'll go for the circle around him and try and get rid of all these people.

And the disciples maybe thought, our leader has gone, we might be next. So they're huddled in this upper room. And then suddenly Jesus appears in the middle of the room.

Now they think at first, this is a ghost. Some translations will say spirit, but in our language it would just be the word ghost. They think this is a ghost.

And Jesus says, it's not a ghost. Look, I'm flesh and blood and bone. They still can't believe though they can see and touch him and they know he's physical.

But is it really Jesus risen from the dead? Then he says to them, it's almost comical. He says, have you got a piece of fish? And they give him a piece of fish.

[17 : 19] And in effect what he's saying to them is, watch this disappear. He puts the fish in his mouth and he eats that bit of fish and it goes into his stomach.

He's saying to them, it's really me. And he shows them his hands and his feet. They can see the marks of the crucifixion. So they know that this physical Jesus in front of them, who's just eaten fish and is speaking to them, is the same Jesus who was crucified through hands and feet and who was dead and buried and is now risen from the grave and in front of them.

And then he commissions them to go into the whole world. And he says, repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached in my name to all the nations of the world.

And they're sent with the good news of a gospel of a saviour who has died and risen again so that people might be forgiven and have new life and it should go to every creature, every person under heaven.

And that's what I mean by the weekend that changed the world. As these people went out with the gospel, they changed the world one person at a time.

[18 : 43] And that's how it must always be. The world is changed by Jesus one person at a time. There's a lot of other things I could say about the weekend that changed the world in terms of all that the Christian church has done in the history of the world.

I could talk about the influence of scientists who are Christians. Early modern science in the West owes its existence to Christians who were in the vanguard of that movement.

Or democracy and the reformation or education and health care and social care or things like the trade union movement.

I remember asking somebody once, why do, they were from, I think they were from Wales, but I think the same thing is true in some parts of England. I said, why are your union groups called chapels?

They said, well, our unions were set up by Christians who were concerned about the working man and the poor. And they would often be the leaders also because they were people who had been converted.

[20 : 02] And the first thing they wanted to do when they were converted is make sure that they were good at reading and writing and so on. And they would work hard at improving their literacy. And when they had union meetings, these guys were Methodists very often.

They would meet in the chapel. That's why a lot of these places were called chapels. Because Christians said of these things and met in chapels.

I could spend the rest of the evening talking about the difference that Christians have made through history and through the nations of the world.

Because Jesus Christ has inspired them to go and help people to preach the gospel, yes, and change lives. That's the most important thing.

But also to change individual circumstances and to seek to change society and to see that the whole world better reflects a God who's concerned for peace and for justice and fairness and equity and the development of people's gifts.

[21 : 08] That people might flourish because he's made them in his image. And he wants them to become his sons and daughters by faith in Jesus and they live flourishing lives to his glory.

And of course all of this, I'm not finished with this, I have no idea. So I have to speak for 20 minutes, I haven't got a clue how long it's been. But all of this also means that that weekend 2,000 years ago changes everything for eternity.

That's a whole other subject, isn't it, on its own. But Jesus died and rose again, not simply so that we might be forgiven in this world and that we might begin every week on the first day of the week celebrating the fact that he's alive, but so that beyond this world we might go to heaven and beyond his return that we might enjoy the new heavens and the new earth forever and forever.

Jesus died and rose again so that we might have a new heaven and a new earth. So the weekend that can change my world and can change your world doesn't just change us for time, but it changes us for eternity and it offers us an eternity of unimagined beauty and glory and excitement as for all eternity we will explore that new cosmos that God will give us and every aspect of our humanity will be perfectly fulfilled in the endless exploration of God and the endless exploration of his world and the endless enjoyment of fellowship with him and with all his people.

So that weekend a couple of millennia ago is a weekend that can change my weekends, can change my life, can change my world, can change my eternity.

[23 : 21] May it be true for every one of us that that weekend has such an impact in us that we can say that's the weekend that changed my world forever.

Let's pray. Lord we thank you for bringing us together tonight and for reminding us of the simple facts at the basis of the Christian faith, that the Son of God really died for our sins and that he really rose again for our eternal salvation.

Help us to build our lives on the bedrock of what Jesus accomplished in this world and help us to know that we are forgiven for now and forever and that because of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ we have purchased for us a new heavens and a new earth where we will be at home with him forever.

So bless us we pray and pardon all our sins in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you Alistair. Thank you very much for the rest. We do pray that each one here would know this even this weekend, we can change each one of our worlds and our lives one at a time and if that's the case then we need a shepherd to go through life with and that's what we're going to close just now singing with the Lord my shepherd and that we would know that Jesus is our shepherd in our lives and we would come to him each day knowing that he will lead us.

[25 : 09] So we'll close just now just by singing this if you're able to stand again to sing that the Lord my shepherd I'm not one he meets the lion pastures. he meets me by he meets me by the still-still waters his goodness restores my soul and I will trust in you alone and I will trust in you alone for your endless mercy mercy follows me your goodness will lead me home he hides my ways in righteousness and he annoys my head with all and my love it overflows with joy

I feast on his pure delight and I will trust in you alone and I will trust in you alone and I will trust in you alone for your endless mercy to follow me your goodness will lead me home home and I will and I will love and I will love the darkest path I will not fear the evil one for you are with me and you're broad and sound broad and sound and comfort

I need to know and I will trust in you you and I will trust in you and I will trust in you alone for your endless mercy Endless mercy follows me.

Your goodness will lead me home. Well, I'd like to thank you again for coming tonight.

And I hope you can all stay for something to eat. We'll just make our way through next door in a wee moment. And thanks to all who've helped with the care in tonight. And we appreciate all the effort that's gone into that.

[29 : 08] I think that's really all I want to say. As we're going through, maybe with the young folks, you can decide if you're young or not tonight. Then maybe I want to let the grunts get some good. Then you guys can go through and do the rest.

And just to thank Alistair again. And also Heiko on the keyboard. All this goes in prayer. Lord God, we thank you that we can be here tonight.

We thank you that we can sing these songs of praise. And we thank you that we can hear so clearly about this weekend that changed the world. And we pray that this would be a real reality for each one of us. That we would trust in you alone, Lord, for all of our lives.

And know that you're leading us. And we praise you that you do this. You care for us. That you love us. And that you've done everything that we need. And we pray that you would fill us with that peace and that joy that comes only from you.

And we thank you, Lord, for this time together. We thank you that we can now have a time of eating and enjoying a cup of tea and that, Lord.

[30 : 10] We pray you bless that to us. And we thank you for all the effort that's gone into putting us together. And we pray that you'd bless the provision to us. And we bless our time together. And we ask all this in Jesus' name.

And we thank you for calling in Jesus' name. And we thank you for all the 1970s.