

Knowing Jesus Christ Crucified

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Date: 02 June 2013

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[0 : 00] Well, dear friends, it's a delight to be here at St. John's on this Sunday, June 2nd, 2013. And it's a delight to be part of this evening service and to see what God's doing and to see some of the developments.

It's a very exciting thing for me. It's already fed my soul to just see all of you and have a sense in our worship of something very special that God is doing. I'm also very grateful that you have been making your way through this great gospel of Mark over the past weeks and months.

And as such, you have been walking through the pages of the gospel with Jesus as he set his face like a flint towards Jerusalem. And it wasn't just a place.

It was an event which would lay ahead. It was the cross. And so I find myself in this extraordinary situation of blessed where, as one who would like to open the word of God, that I get to be the one who tonight of all nights gets to be the preacher when the focus is the very fact and key of the gospel of Mark.

Recently, I was visiting a family in Manitoba, and they kindly put me up, which was good, because it would have been lonely otherwise to not have somewhere to stay.

[1 : 24] And just outside the door of the room, which they kindly allowed me to stay in, there was a bookshelf. And on it was a book that I had not seen before, which is by Bill O'Reilly of Fox News and Martin Dugard called Killing Kennedy, The End of Camelot.

Now, I don't know if anyone has read. It's a quick read. It's not difficult at all. Well, the previous book that apparently they did was Killing Lincoln. So you can see the parallels, two great presidents. And what is of interest, and the reason I'm telling you this, is that as you read this somber, sad, sordid story of this, is in ways a very encouraging and hopeful individual, and in other ways an unworthy individual.

But nevertheless, they're the President of the United States, but in some sense unwittingly finding his way towards November 22, 1963, 12.30 p.m. in Dallas.

And if you read the book, you discover that, in fact, each chapter is actually pegged by the timeline of how much closer it is to this event.

[2 : 45] And the whole thing is leading to his death, to the shots ringing out in that day. Now, I'm old enough that I remember.

I was in an exam that day. That's how old I was. In an exam, and we were actually spared the exam. It was ended immediately when word happened. So these things, now that's a side issue which is not of importance, but what is of importance in terms of our enterprise tonight is that Mark similarly, like O'Reilly, set the tone and the sequence of the Gospel of Mark very clearly to head in one direction, to the cross.

Mark 15, 21 to 41. As early as Mark 3, verse 6, we already are hearing that the Pharisees and the Herodians are conspiring to destroy Jesus.

It's never far from the surface. It's always there, the cross, the death of Jesus coming. Perhaps you'll remember as you made your way that Mark 8 is the dividing point in the great Gospel.

It was there that Jesus and the disciples, on kind of a field trip to Caesarea Philippi, under the shadow of the great temple to the pantheon of pagan gods, Jesus asked the question of them, who do men say that I am?

[4 : 15] And ultimately, who do you say that I am? And Peter said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And shockingly, and surprisingly, and disappointingly, certainly for Peter, that high, you are the Christ, suddenly became a warning in Mark 8, 31, that what was to come was a cross, was suffering, death, and a cross, and on the third day rise.

So Mark 8, 31, warning. Mark 9, 31. And by Mark 10, 32, this is what it says, in a way the most graphic presentation and warning of the cross.

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them, and they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. Now it doesn't say what there was, why they were amazed, or why they were afraid, but my sense is, that there was something about the purposefulness of Jesus, about this setting his face like a flint towards Jerusalem, about an unwillingness to compromise or being deviated from the goal, such that he was heading in that direction, and if you're coming, come, because I'm on my way.

It says, and taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, see, we're going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and to the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles, and they will mock him and spit on him and flog him.

That's as far as we've got up until tonight, and then tonight, and kill him. And after the three days, he will rise. That's the sequence and the plan and the purpose and the direction of the Gospel of Mark, always, always, always heading towards the cross.

[6 : 15] And so it's your privilege and mine, friends, tonight to focus on what was the purpose of the Son of Man coming into this world.

Now, we're going to, if you would like to follow in the Pew Bibles, or if maybe you have your Bible handy, we're starting at verse 21 of Mark 15, and what I propose to do is to kind of walk through the page, the verses of that, and make a few comments along the way.

And then after that, then from a way of analysis and reflection, ask the question, okay, if the cross is so important, what is this about what Mark has told us, which gives us clues as to what it is, the meaning of the cross.

There'll be no surprises when we come to the analysis. The headings are going to be ones that we've already sung wonderfully and gloriously in our worship, and there is a clear connection between what we said in our hearts and what we've worshipped and where we're heading in terms of the preaching.

Verse 21, and they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene. Cyrene is part of what is Libya today, northern Africa.

[7 : 30] Apparently there was a very strong Jewish community. How and why? Presumably Simon was there because of the Passover, whether he was just a passer, an onlooker, and unwittingly got roped in.

Of course, the beginning of this passage is obviously Jesus bearing the cross, staggering on his way to his death, having already been flogged, which was enough to kill many right there.

And so this guy is drawn in. Why that's so significant to us other than it happened is a good question. that he was compelled, he was grabbed by the Romans and instructed to do this.

Tells us that he was coming in from the country and the father of Alexander and Rufus. And who they are, he's their father.

We don't know other than there is a Rufus in Romans 16 that when Paul is writing to the church in Rome, this Rufus and his mother doesn't mention the father and doesn't mention an Alexander.

[8 : 38] But whatever the thing, obviously Mark seems to suggest you're going to know who these folks are. They're of significance. And whether it was that in fact by this extraordinary event that became a life-changing event, we don't know.

But what is clear is that in fact there are no onlookers. He was compelled, drawn in, had to do it. And I suggest to you today, dear friends, this is not a stretch.

This is the reality. That there's no onlookers tonight either. We cannot stand by and see what happens in Mark 15, 21 to 41 and be simply, isn't that interesting?

Well, that was quite the thing. Isn't that horrible? What happened? It is in fact the critical issue for our life. And you have hope only if you understand the cross and if you don't, you have no hope at all.

Verse 22. And he took, and they brought them to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. What a name for Jesus' crucifixion.

[9 : 47] Verse 23. And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. Jesus chose to drink the cup of suffering to its full.

To drink it right to the dregs, to the bottom, whereby nothing would be allowed to anesthetize, numb, in any way assist.

He had to full on bear the suffering which was for him because of us. And that's what he did. So he declined. Verse 24. And they crucified him.

Let's stop right there. Interesting thinking of the text which Aaron read at the beginning of our service where it speaks about not using human words of wisdom.

And if I was Mark, I would have spent sentences and pages trying to whip the reader up to some sort of understanding of how dramatic and how horrible and how sad and how incredible this is.

[10:59] But what he does, he says, and they crucified him. Paul said, For I decided to do nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified and I was with you in weakness and in fear and trembling and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in a demonstration of the spirit and of the power that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of man but in the power of God.

Clearly Mark expects and counts on the cross standing by itself to have its power and so that our faith would be based on a manifestation of the spirit's power and not on any kind of eloquence which would have been based in trying to describe it.

And they crucified him and divided his garments among them casting lots for them to decide what each should take. What a humiliation. This is Jesus and there naked strung up on a cross hands nailed feet nailed later a spear in the side and all the little he owns being divided and this is already predicted in Psalm 22 I think verse 18 which speaks about that and there it is happening as was recorded.

Verse 25 and it was the third hour when they crucified him 9 o'clock in the morning. I know there's some discrepancy some of the gospels speak about the sixth hour as opposed to the third hour but as we'll see in a few minutes it was in the sixth hour that the nation became covered in darkness.

And the inscription verse 26 of the charge against him read the king of the Jews. Now we know as we read the other gospels what was going on there.

[12:57] This is the text which Pilate himself instructed should be placed as the basis in which he's being crucified. From a technical viewpoint it's suggesting that he's a usurper that he's one who stands over and against the authority of Caesar and therefore deserves to die.

But we also know that in fact he was being slightly mischievous he was taking one little bit of enjoyment that he was sort of getting at the chief priests who had backed him into this corner whereby he was incapable of getting out without killing this guy that he knew to be innocent.

But at least he can put the words the king of the Jews. They said it says in John 19 don't say king of the Jews say he said he was king of the Jews.

And if you remember in John 19 I think verse 22 Pilate said what I have written I have written. He stood finally he got some backbone and stood but for all time there is this unexpected witness of who Jesus is.

He's the king. King of kings and lord of lords. The king is the crucified one. Verse 27 and with him they crucified two robbers one on his right and one on his left.

[14:25] Verse 28 where is verse 28? The mystery of the missing verse. If you read in your margins depending on your Bible there's usually a statement the King James version actually has verse 28 which says and the scripture was fulfilled that says he was numbered with the transgressors.

Quoting from Isaiah 53 verse 12. Whether or not that verse and of course it has to do with which are the best texts and the oldest and so it's quite reasonable that there wasn't a verse 28 but the force of it remains the same.

That in fact the significance is that you might think that surely Jesus would get special treatment. Surely there should be a special at least exalted kind of crucifixion for such a one but instead of that he's just one of three.

There he is. One of the three lawbreakers getting what he deserves. Counted with the transgressors. Verse 29 and those who passed by derided him wagging their heads.

Of course this takes us again back to Psalm 22 and talks about wagging heads. And these horrible words of mocking. you would think that any ounce of mercy would have at least allowed this guy who obviously was dying in weakness to be allowed to be to be.

[15:53] But instead of that the crowd interestingly again a witness aha you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days there it is that's what he's doing save yourself and come down

from the cross.

So also the chief priest with the scribes mocked him to one another saying he saved others he cannot save himself let and there they get sort of very official and titles let the Christ the king of Israel come down from the cross that we may see and believe and those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

Again this is looking to Psalm 22 exactly what was said there is happening here. Verse 33 and when the sixth hour had come there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

All of creation you know it says in Romans 8 that in fact all of creation is waiting for the I better read it because I can't get the words there for creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God and so there is this very real thing Genesis 3 all of creation was put out of kilter and it became a dog eat dog horrible existence a grinding down a halt all of this and then but looking for something to happen and so with the cross the critical thing is happening and so the father is clearly not able to watch as the son goes through that without in some way calling on creation to make clear that something dramatic is happening.

Luke 23 speaks of it as a solar eclipse and the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani not good at that which means my God my God why hast thou forsaken me which again looks back to Psalm 22 verse 1 and some of the bystanders hearing it said behold he's calling Elijah and someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine put it on a reed and gave it to him saying wait let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down but there would be no intervention by Elijah it's interesting that even the most cynical of cynics standing by confident that he's about to breathe his last watching him expire before their eyes confident that it's about to happen even they as they watch are not 100% sure that something dramatic is not going to happen perhaps he is calling on Elijah but maybe you'll remember in Luke 9

[18 : 49] Luke's account of the transfiguration and where Luke speaks about Jesus being transfigured and these two figures of the Old Testament Moses and Elijah being with him and you remember what it says they were doing it says in verse 31 they were speaking to him about his departure which he would accomplish in Jerusalem there could be no intervention by Elijah even if that made any sense at all or had anything to do with what Jesus was crying because Elijah of all people along with Moses we're not wanting him to come down from the cross but we're declaring to him you gotta stay you gotta stay the course because if you save yourself we're all sunk Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last verse 38 and the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom that clear divider between a holy God and sinful man that divider that says no place for you because of sin in fact if you ever dared to come through you would be consumed and judged and die immediately but now the curtain is torn and we discover that in fact what appears with Jesus as if he's capitulating as if he's giving up as if it's over as if all is lost instead of that this is clearly a cry of victory and that in fact it is finished it's done and the curtain is torn because now the holy God is available to sinful man because of the blood of Jesus because of this success of his cross so what is our analysis well let me just list quickly six points point number one

Jesus laid down his life the gospel of Mark as all the other gospels is clear that if you were to think that this is a story of a guy who is somewhat naive who somehow found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time and too nice to realize the signs and found himself where things conspired against him and he ended up dead that is not the understanding of Mark and that's not what he's saying he's saying that Jesus laid down his life and the scriptures being fulfilled is the evidence of the fact that there's a very intricate plan the will of the father which the son is implementing in his life and now supremely in the cross in his death do you remember what Jesus said in that passage on the good shepherd he said for this reason the father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again no one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord

I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again this charge I have received from my father Jesus speaks very clearly don't make the mistake of thinking this is things conspired against me it is that Jesus chose of his will because of love to lay down his life that's point number one point number two he took on his shoulders my sin and yours of course all of scripture is given to say was it not necessary for the son of man to die as Jesus on that walk in Luke 24 is recorded on the first Easter evening but in fact all of scriptures and so it should come as no surprise that there's texts which make clear and so for instance Paul speaking about the glory of the transformation in Jesus therefore if anyone be in Christ he's a new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come speaks about a people who previously thought of Jesus one way

but now see him in another way and now live not for themselves but on the God who died for them who now are ambassadors who understand that God is reconciling the world to himself and what's the message he who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God that's what's happening as we see it in Mark there is this and so it is that the numbered with the transgressors in verse 27 and 28 as tied to Isaiah 53 is clearly an explanation of the fact how did Jesus get there it's because he's taking my sin and yours and I would recommend to you dear friend if you've never done this before that you take

Isaiah 53 and Aaron was telling me that you've spent quite a bit of time in Isaiah 53 in recent weeks but insert your name where it's we put your name and have a sense of the personal nature no onlookers he has my sin on his shoulders Jesus laid down his life he took my sin on his shoulders for Christ also has suffered once for sins the perfect for the imperfect it says in 1 Peter 3 18 thirdly he suffered and died in my place he was substituted in these are loaded words words that people have died for they're so important and of course Jesus himself the mocking of the people he saved others let him save himself did you ever think wouldn't it be great if he'd done it if he said okay you say come down here I and he'd sort of taken his arms off in some sort of

Marvel movie or whatever and came down from the cross and confronted them I'd kind of like that in many ways but in fact it would be horrible it would be the end hope all hope would be lost the invitation and the mocking what said save yourself was something that he could not not because he wasn't able but could not for our sakes and would not he died and suffered in my place and in yours fourthly he took my judgment and my hell Eli Eli lama sabachthani my God my God why hast thou forsaken me what is the son of God saying words like that now I know that in fact there would be an aspect of actually a looking to the horrors of what he was going through but also of the vindication that lay ahead we know that that's what happened that he had that sense and Psalm 22 speaks of that but primarily those words speak of the fact that Jesus himself the righteous one the holy one the only good man the only sinless one actually and the son of God there's this wedge in this gap of driven between like a and hell becomes his portion and and so he cries out what my God my God why hast thou forsaken me many of you will know very well

[26 : 52] Stuart Townsend's great song how deep the father's love listen to this and see if you identify behold the man upon the cross my sin upon his shoulders ashamed I hear my mocking voice call out among the scoffers it was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished his dying breath has brought me life I know that it is finished and so fourthly as he took my judgment fifthly it was enough hallelujah this is a glory account this is a this is a victory this is the definitive and final act of God to deal with sin and it is enough once died for all upon the cross this drinking of the sour wine and the crying out is last the gospel of John fills that in with

I thirst to fulfill the scriptures and then this cry it is finished and that's what Stuart Townsend is referring to because clearly that cry of Jesus was in fact that it was a glorious cry it was a it's done hallelujah it was satisfaction it was verse 11 out of the anguish of his soul of Isaiah 53 he shall see and be satisfied by his knowledge and shall the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their iniquities therefore I will divide him a portion with the many and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors it was enough and he was satisfied and the father was satisfied it was done hallelujah and so the curtain was torn as we've already set and even an unexpected one like the centurion who shouldn't have even noticed all of this ends up saying truly this is the son of God just as in Luke 23 we know of the thief the one thief who similarly came to faith in Jesus and he said this day I'll see you in paradise no onlookers this event is for you friend I am sure that the vast majority of folk here today I can I can tell know exactly these words this is a recounting of a familiar story which is the joyful telling of the story of your life but it's possible in any gathering that there could be one or two or more who find themselves here maybe week after week after week walking through the gospel of Mark and now they find themselves at the foot of the cross today and they find themselves confronted with the fact that he stayed on the cross and it is finished so dear friend whether here for the first time or many times if you know yourself to be one who has not appropriated or benefited from his passion from what he's accomplished why wait another day one of the things that I concluded when I was made a bishop was that wherever I go I will take the opportunity as I'm a guest and then what can people do but I will take the opportunity and invite people to respond to the gospel and so dear friend if you don't know the crucified one and you've been surveying the cross this evening and you've concluded it was for you he died he bore

your sins on his shoulders and it's enough I invite you and there will be a prayer in a minute where you could respond by faith and what a glorious thing what a great way to end June 2nd 2013 than to become a child of God in that way for the rest of you who already are there I pray that this this recounting of this familiar gospel account will be a source of growing joy and love for Jesus listen to the words of Hebrews 10 which speak in this way therefore brothers and sisters since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh and since we have a great priest over the house of

God let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water would you stand with me Lord Jesus Christ we stand amazed at the foot of the cross we acknowledge our personal responsibility for it we recognize as how deep the father's love song declares that we would be the mockers we would be crying out as well but tonight we're so grateful that you didn't hear that and respond by coming down but you stayed the course and you died and it is enough it is finished the curtain has been torn the way to the father is now open wide and we can run into his presence by virtue of the blood of

[33 : 17] Jesus by the Holy Spirit who manifests to us that we are children of God Abba Father and so Lord as there may be one or two or many who tonight for the first time are crying out for mercy we thank you that you are hearing them we invite you to come into their lives and to begin a life for all eternity we thank you Lord for the security of that life my sheep hear my voice and I know them and I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of their hands and so as we ponder the cross tonight we thank you that it causes us to love you Jesus more and more and to be filled with a keen sense of assurance which propels us into a growth and newness of life more and more hallelujah amen