

The Innocent Lamb of God

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[0 : 00] Our Heavenly Father, we praise you for the Lord Jesus Christ and for the privilege of giving gifts so that his name would be preached and known more widely.

We ask now as we come to this very wonderful passage that you would open our hearts that we might see the Lord Jesus Christ more clearly and what he has done for us by dying for us.

And we ask as Paul speaks that our hearts may burn within us and we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Thank you very much David for your prayer and good morning everybody.

I guess we were all fairly moved or very much moved this morning as we heard that passage from Luke chapter 23 so beautifully read for us.

So simple, the passage so profound, so good.

[1 : 08] I compare it with a book I saw in a bookshop yesterday entitled 99 Religious Choices for Savvy Seekers.

The subtitle, How to Find the Religion that Fits Your Lifestyle Choices and Afterlife Goals. How to Find the Religion that Fits Your Lifestyle Choices and Afterlife Goals.

What a contrast between that and the simplicity and depth of Luke's narrative of Jesus' last hours. And what an encouragement they are to us.

How they provoke us to think with thankfulness about the faithfulness of Jesus and our own lives. It's been my privilege to speak for several weeks now on these passages from Luke.

And you may recall, you may not of course, that on week one, two weeks ago, I spoke on the first part of Luke chapter 22. In which the central section was about the last supper and institution of the Lord's Supper.

[2 : 25] But before that was the account of Judas' plot to betray Jesus for money. And after the last supper passage, there's a passage that just really highlights the shallowness and selfishness of the disciples.

So, sort of between these bookends of very human behaviour, we have this magnificent passage about the last supper and the Lord's Supper.

Which in turn reminds us that thanks to the death that Jesus died and thanks to the spirit of Jesus, unleashed through the new covenant for which he died, there is a huge change made in the lives of the disciples as years unfold, including Peter.

And what an encouragement that therefore is to us. That as we truly lay hold of the meaning of the death of Jesus for us and truly have the power of the spirit of God within our own lives, that we can see such considerable transformation.

Last week, in the second part of Luke 22, we considered the extremities of the narrative where Jesus begins by praying and ends by prevailing against the pressures that were against him under trial.

[3 : 51] And between those two extremities, we saw sadly the example of the disciples sleeping instead of praying and then indeed failing, failing in particular to confess Jesus.

So, Jesus prevails under prayer and confesses that he is the Messiah. Peter crumbles under pressure and denies that he is.

Again, profound challenges for us. In Luke 23, the outer edges, the extremities of the long passage begin with accusation against Jesus and conclude with crucifixion, accusation, crucifixion.

But between that, we see these alternating verdicts. Some say he's not guilty. Others say he is.

And so, Luke walks us through his narrative. We are being engaged in a way that is calling upon us to make decisions as to the guilt or otherwise of Jesus.

[5 : 05] Well, in these long passages, of course, we have to be quite selective for reasons of time. And today, I just have two themes to share with us. The first is that Jesus was indeed innocent.

And then, a little bit greater length, Jesus is our great example. Jesus is our icon. I-C-O-N. So, first, he was innocent.

It's interesting that, as the narrative goes through, Luke parades no less than 11 people or groups of people who pass a verdict on Jesus.

11. In the two official trials, the judges say he is innocent. Pilate, I find no guilt in him.

Herod, ruler of Galilee, he has done nothing to deserve death. Right? Okay. By contrast, the religious authorities, the chief priests, demand crucify, crucify.

[6 : 10] Going to the cross, Jesus tells the women to weep for themselves and their children. In other words, he's saying, I'm innocent. And that, in fact, judgment is coming on Jerusalem, which indeed it did in the year AD 70, about 40 years later.

At the cross, there are varying reactions. Rulers scoff. Soldiers mock. One of the two criminals rails at him.

Then there's a contrast. The other criminal, this man has done nothing wrong. And even the Roman centurion, the one in charge of the execution squad, says, certainly this man was innocent.

So, 11 voices with differing opinions about Jesus. Luke, the writer, of course, is in no doubt.

This was a miscarriage of justice. Jesus was innocent. So, what do we do with Luke's information?

[7 : 14] Well, I take it we accept it. We accept that he was innocent. Is there a challenge here? Yes, there is. And the challenge is to look into our own hearts and to determine that we will never decide about anyone or anything without all the facts.

Human tragedy is that we tend to be guided so often by prejudice. We make up our minds often too quickly about people and things.

And so often we are wrong because we haven't essayed and surveyed and thought about and prayed about all the facts. Jesus says, With what judgment you judge, you will be judged.

I say this because Christian people, such as we are, such as I am, are not immune from making really serious mistakes about people as these people did in this narrative.

And we're not firewalled against that possibility. So we need to be people who are aware of our prejudices and people who want to get all the facts.

[8 : 30] The second thing I think that comes out of this passage is of course the great example of Jesus under suffering, under unjust suffering.

And this he displays on the one hand towards God, on the other hand towards people. Think of Jesus and God.

Verse 46. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. How do we explain the quiet dignity of Jesus throughout this ordeal?

Except that he prayed. The previous night in Gethsemane, he said, Not my will, Father, but yours be done. Take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours be done.

Since then he's been betrayed by Judas, a friend, denied absolutely by another friend, Peter, deserted by all the rest, and failed by the system.

[9 : 42] He's faced trial by Pilate and Herod, the chief priests. He's been flogged, verbally abused, mocked and ridiculed. And yet through it all, there has been this quiet, calm.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. We rejoice above all that Jesus is our saviour and our deliverer and our redeemer in whom we put our trust.

But we must never forget that Jesus is also our great example of one who trusts in God when times are evil and when evil seems to be in control.

So Jesus is our great example of how to relate with God and to God when times are tough.

Second, we are taught here about Jesus' relationship with others. There were the soldiers who mocked him and he says, Father, forgive them.

[10 : 54] They know not what they do. There is the other criminal who rebuked his fellow criminal, admitted his own culpability and asked Jesus for mercy.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus says, Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

It was a true promise. Truly I say to you. It was a promise for today, the day of death. Today you will be with me.

It was a promise to be with Jesus. Today you will be with me. It was a promise to be with Jesus in paradise. Today you will be with me in paradise.

Anita and I know a lady who worked in a hospital. This lady, a Christian lady, was conscious that one of the patients was near death.

[12 : 12] She had quite a lot to do with this patient and she discerned that this patient was deeply anxious and asked her, was something worrying her.

She said that she understood that her end was very near but that she hadn't had time to do penance before the end. The lady asked her, did she know the story about the penitent thief?

Yes, she did. The lady asked, did she have time to do penance? The lady replied, no, he didn't. She asked, what did he ask of Jesus?

He asked for mercy. Did he receive mercy? I'm not sure. Jesus said, today, you will be with me in paradise.

Do you think Jesus would say that to you? She asked. I'm not sure. Have you asked him? No. Would you like to say a little prayer with me?

[13 : 29] So that you do ask him, yes, I would like that very much. And she did. And she died in peace.

So we see Jesus trusting in God. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. We see Jesus caring for others.

Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. Today, you will be with me in paradise. So, brothers and sisters, how do we relate to God when times are tough?

How do we relate to others when times are tough? Well, the answer is we look to Jesus. Jesus is our icon. One of the most overused words in our lexicon is the word iconic.

I read a recent article which mentioned 50 examples of the word iconic qualified by something else. It started up with iconic assassin and finished with iconic yoghurt.

[14 : 40] Yoghurt. Yoghurt. In the TV age we are bombarded with icons. Politicians, Mr Obama's lean face and prominent ears.

Tiger Woods smiling face and red t-shirt. The marketers bombard us with these images to influence us. Is there an icon who exemplifies the way we should live?

Is there someone who shows us definitively how to relate to God in tough times? Is there someone who shows us definitively how to relate to others in tough times?

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus is our icon. Jesus is the image of God amongst us. To him we look and from him we learn.

The Gospels interestingly mentioned varying details about Jesus' walk to Golgotha, place of the skull.

[15 : 53] In John's Gospel Jesus carries his own cross. Matthew and Mark however say that Simon of Cyrene carried the cross. Perhaps Jesus was unable to carry it the whole distance.

Luke's Gospel alone says Simon carried the cross walking behind Jesus. Luke is very skillfully portraying Simon of Cyrene as the proper and typical disciple.

Someone who follows Jesus. Someone who carries his cross. And that cross of course is Jesus' discipleship teaching which we have in this passage.

how you relate to God in tough times. How you relate to others in tough times. Simon of Cyrene's way is not one of the 99 choices for savvy seekers of easy religion.

Brothers and sisters life is confusing. It is hard to know always what to think about God. It is hard to know how to relate to one another.

[17 : 20] But we have in Jesus the icon. And we have in Simon of Cyrene who followed Jesus and who carried his cross.

A quick pen portrait of the typical disciple. Brothers and sisters let us learn from Jesus and let us follow him.

especially when times are tough. Amen. Please sit or kneel for prayers.

At the end of this time of prayer I will pray the prayer of St. Christ Dostum and then we will pray together at the bottom of page seven the grace. Our heavenly father whose love is complete and beyond our understanding we laud and magnify you and may we have open and soft hearts such that we will say with the psalmist consider how I love your precepts give me life according to your steadfast love the sum of your word is truth and every one of your righteous rules endures forever Lord in your mercy dear Lord in our weakness come to us and encourage us we acknowledge and confess our too frequent tendency to slip into wanting and exercising faith on our own terms bolstered by our own will and our own resources a faith undergirded by a perspective that fits into our own often convenient and self-serving worldview and then when we find that faith weak we blame you whether we are hearing your word

Lord for the first time or yet once again after many hearings may we hear your word with new and open hearts and see your glory with unveiled eyes and understand your majesty and power and love for us such that our faith is rooted and grounded in you for you are the almighty God who made us who sustains this world who suffered death to pay the penalty for our sinfulness and thus rescued us we praise you dear Lord that you live in us and give us times of great joy you accompany us through times of trial you knit love to each other and you are our only true hope Lord in your mercy we bring the world to you in prayer dear father knowing that the nations of the world are in your hands and the leaders thereof are your instruments may you speak to them and may they hear and may you empower them to govern courageously with acts of mercy and justice such that your word can go forth unencumbered in our province and city we thank you for the many opportunities this season brings to be together with loved ones for those who are visiting

[20 : 37] Vancouver we ask for safety and health and we ask that a sense of your wonder and awe may inspire a fresh view of you as Lord of the universe and Lord of our lives for those who have come to Vancouver for theological studies may new and old relationships be rich Lord in your mercy for those whom you've called to minister your good news and your love here in Vancouver we ask your hand of encouragement we pray for Richie Spidell with navigators and for Kirsten Rumerie with living waters for those overseas we ask your hand of protection and open doors we pray for Jeremy Curry with YWAM and for Erica and Jess Cantalon in Jerusalem we pray for the Felber family for Stefan Ulrica Josiah

Jonathan and Johanna as they leave St. John's to return to Switzerland thank you dear God for their presence with us over the past several months we pray that you dear Lord will use their time spent at Regent for your glory provide safe travel home for them help the children to restart in a new school and bless Ulrica back in their Swiss home dear Lord help Stefan as he lectures on the Old Testament and enable him to finish the book he began writing here in Vancouver we we ask Lord for your closeness and comfort at this time for Mike Jill and Paul Tresco after the death of their son and brother Sam this week we also pray for the family of Velva Wells for Anne Marie and Deborah and their families as they mourn the death of their dear mother and grandmother and we offer thanks for the life and witness of

Rachel Barkey and ask for your comfort for her husband and children after her death this past week Lord in your mercy we ask Lord for rest and renewal for David for Dan on leave for Jim this summer and those many others who have stepped up to fill roles in the life of St.

John at this time we offer a very special thanks to you for Bishop Paul as he has taken on a large load during his days here in Vancouver both in his ministry to us and at Regent may he too find some rest and renewal in you we ask your healing hand on those who are ill and on those who are facing ongoing difficult emotional physical or financial situations we remember these in our midst by name Ron and Stephen dear Lord we acknowledge that you have put people into our lives who have been supremely important to us and for them we wish to thank you as well you have put people into our lives who need your sustenance and hope and those we wish to bring to you in these moments of silence hear our prayers for all these that we love and care about Lord in your mercy our heavenly father may we on life's path meet again the person of

Jesus our Lord and give pause and sit with him and hear him say to our innermost being if you abide in my word you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free dear Lord you are the great shepherd who finds us in the darkness to bring us back to the light who tends our wounds and our brokenness who reunites us with yourself fills us with power to love and gives us hope for tomorrow to you be all glory and honor forever and ever amen almighty god who has given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee and us promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy name thou wilt grant their requests fulfill now oh lord the desires and petitions of thy servants as may be most expedient for them granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth and in the world to come life everlasting amen together the grace of our lord jesus christ and the love of god and the fellowship of the holy spirit be with us all ever more amen you