

A Crisis For The Disciples & Us

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 March 1989

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Well, as Tom told you, I mean, if you want to ask questions, I'd be glad to hear them. I don't know whether I could answer any of them or not, but I, um, there was going to be some provision for questions to be asked and to be perhaps dealt with.

But if you have questions, I'd be glad either that you asked me personally or whether, I'm not sure that I can answer them. We had a lovely time last night.

I, I, uh, I don't want to be too sort of triumphalist about telling you, but it was, we were having this sort of series put on by the Burnaby Multicultural Society, visiting various, uh, various, uh, religious centers to see what the various religions are.

And last night they came to our church and they wanted to know what Christianity was. And so we made a presentation of what Christianity is, you see. And then, uh, we had a question period afterwards and, uh, uh, well, you know, the usual question came up, you know, uh, Christianity is very exclusive.

Yes, very exclusive. Uh, there's only one way to heaven. Yes, there's only one. What if I am a Hindu? What happens to me then? Well, you know, I've heard that question hundreds of times and been caught on that.

[1 : 27] And how do you answer it? And, uh, in, because it's very complicated, but before I had a chance to answer it, a very dark gentleman sitting in the circle said, I am a Hindu and I have become a Christian and I'll tell you how it works.

And, uh, he, he, he gave a wonderful story and, uh, was, uh, it was a quite surprising thing to me, uh, when he just told what the story was and the story simply, uh, was as simple as this, you know, I mean, it, he said, uh, I worked downtown in one of the buildings on maintenance, keeping things going.

He said, I, uh, I listened to an FM radio station where there was somebody preaching, telling about Christianity in Hindustani, which was his native language.

And he said, I, they asked me to phone in. So I phoned in and, uh, the, uh, the man came over to see me and we talked for a while and then he prayed with me.

He said, nobody ever prayed with me before in all my life. Nothing like that had ever happened. And he said, and, and something happened. And I mean, it was very simple, very direct and very real.

[2 : 49] And this man for all the fact that, that, uh, he was really a new Christian was extremely articulate. And, uh, it was, uh, it was really a lovely thing to have happened.

But anyway, I, I, uh, the chairman of the meeting said, well, of course there are many Christians who have become Hindus. We should hear from one of them now, but there wasn't one there to speak.

So, um, so it was, uh, it was just an interesting story. I, um, we finished last week, the, the Luke 23 story, which is, uh, a magnificent literary tapestry, you know, which I tried to tear apart, but it's still there.

It's still whole. And you can go and look at it and see how beautifully woven into this picture of the person of Christ is, is the, the chief priests and their terrible jealousy and Pilate and his terrible equivocations and Herod and his spinelessness and the women and their discernment and Simon, uh, the one who carried the cross and the good thief and the centurion who suddenly found himself standing at the bottom of the cross, praising God.

Um, and then the story of Joseph of Arimathea and the, and the way all those stories are, are woven together and, uh, and around the event of Christ's death.

[4 : 29] And next week we, I want to go on with the three stories in, in Luke 24 of the resurrection day, the, the early morning story when the women went to the grave and then the story in the

afternoon when Christ joined two of his disciples walking on the road to Emmaus.

And then the late evening when he broke in on, uh, a group of the disciples meeting, uh, behind closed doors for fear of the, uh, for fear of the Jews.

Well, you, you, uh, we've talked about in a sense, the event, which is, which is the death of Christ. But most of the new Testament is, is built on the fact that that event, which is an historical event, you know, I mean, it's historically verifiable that this in fact is what happened that this man born, uh, of Mary suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified, dead and buried.

History says that's what happened. But what did it mean? And what I would like you to look at today, just in your mind's eye is, is that, uh, is that this was really a crisis in the life of the disciples and the lives of the disciples.

[5 : 57] The slow erosion of all their expectations. It was a watershed point. They had for three years, there had been the buildup of the unlimited potential of this man who was able to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind, to make the lame walk, to make the deaf hear, to make the dumb speak, to feed the 5,000.

All those things built up in them, this great expectation. Who is this man? Is there anything he cannot do? And we are his disciples.

And he talks about a kingdom. And the kingdom is going to be a great kingdom. And it's going to supersede any kingdom that had ever been, because was there ever such a man as this?

And so the disciples are built up and built up and built up in this expectation. And, uh, suddenly, uh, Christ, you know, comes to the point where, as perhaps John's gospel gives it, this, this amazing miracle that Jesus' friend, Lazarus, who for four days had been in the tomb, and whose sisters were distraught and in tears, and Christ himself came and wept at the tomb, and, uh, commanded, Lazarus, come forth.

And wrapped in grave clothes, Lazarus came forth from the tomb. Well, you know, at that point, the, uh, the establishment swung into action.

[7 : 42] You know, the whole thing had gone much too far. And it wasn't only the disciples that realized the, uh, the potential. But, uh, now the religious establishment, which was, in a sense, coterminous with the political establishment and the, and the social establishment, the whole, the whole group said, this is it.

This group of people whom, uh, I think Psalm 73 describes them. Psalm 73 is a great psalm. But it talks about them sound and sleek in body.

Pride is their necklace. They are strong and respected members of the community. Their eyes swell with fatness. Uh, that was a good sign for them.

We're not keen on that ourselves. But I guess in those days, it was a sign that you're well-fed and well-rested. Your eyes swelling with fatness. Their tongues strut through the earth, proud of all that they say.

They are popular heroes. And they look at the world and they say, how can God know what we're doing? So they are able to do anything. So that this, in a sense, was the establishment and this small group of disciples with their high expectations so that they were saying, Lord, when you come in your kingdom, will you give me the place on your right hand and my brother the place on your left?

[9 : 11] Because obviously, you're going to establish a kingdom and this kingdom is going to be such as the world has never seen before. And then the establishment moved in.

And in a night, their leader is arrested, tried, condemned, betrayed. And by noon the next day, he's crucified.

And that's the point at which I want you to look at the disciples. And I want you to see that that is the very point which inevitably we must come to in our own lives, where all the joy and the idealism and the visions and the hope and the enthusiasm ultimately erode away or are smashed by some catastrophic event and they all disappear.

And we, like the disciples, are in total or disarray. There's no way ahead. There's nothing to do. You're done. You're finished. And you recognize that if you can survive, that's about all you can ask. And even your survival hangs on a thin thread. And I think this is the great moment, wonderfully portrayed in this story as the great moment of human life.

[10 : 44] It's the moment we need to come to. I appreciate very much the wisdom of AA and their little slogan that says, if you want a drink, that's your business.

If you want to stop, that's ours. And the kind of practical reality that until you've come to the bottom, you won't listen to us and we're not going to listen to you. You've got to come to the point where all your visioning and illusions and all your unlimited potential of who you are, all that you suddenly find turns.

I love, I must say, Smirnoff's vodka, not for the contents of the bottle, but for their advertising. I mean, I really am not into the contents of the bottle.

But, you know, that sort of dynamic advertising where they see something totally alive. You know, there is vodka and then there is Smirnoff's and it's totally alive.

Well, this is, in a sense, the opposite experience. There is life in the youthful ambition of our, the sort of prime of our life, but then inevitably that erodes away and it's gone and you come to the moment where everything goes gray and all the color runs out and it's finished.

[12:04] That's the point. And that's the point the disciples had come to with the death of Jesus Christ. They were at the bottom of the barrel.

Now, it's not the place that one goes to intentionally, but it is the place where everybody arrives inevitably.

It's the place where Joseph is in prison. It's the place where Abraham has been given a promise by God, has gone out. And with a wife who's in her 90s and she, he himself is 100.

And he's told to look at the night sky and told, your children will be more in number than the stars of the sky. And Abraham says, you know, that's, you know, that's, that's not true.

And it's, it's the point, it's the point at which in, in the story of the crucifixion where Christ himself enters fully into this dramatic human experience when he says, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

[13:11] Total annihilation, total forsakenness. There is nothing. There is no hope. It's all gone.

Well, that's, you know, that's the point at which you decide whether you're going to keep up the facade or keep up appearances or try and get away with it or recognize that that, in fact, is the reality.

And that's what, that's the point that Jesus had to bring his disciples to. In Mark's gospel, he told them three times, you must understand that it's necessary.

The son of man will be, be betrayed into the hands of wicked men and he will be put to death. But they didn't listen to that. And most of us don't listen to the, to this reality, which I think is at the heart of Christian faith, that there is this bottom out experience.

There is this God forsaken experience. There is no answer. There is no hope. There is no meaning. There is no purpose.

There is no purpose. There is no purpose. And at that point in our lives, that's the critical point.

That's the critical point at which you will say, well, let's pretend there is.

[14:31] And we live a life of pretense from that point on. But I, I want you to, to think about it a little more.

I want you to think about it in this way. But you see, what happened here was that, that Christ's death, which they took to be the ultimate disaster.

Now this, I think, is the story of the New Testament. I mean, it's, it's, you can, you can look it through. The death of Christ, you know, Christ on the cross, you know, in, in John's gospel says, it is finished.

It's over. You know, I am forsaken. It's, it, it, it comes to that, that, that point of total sort of dereliction.

But then you see, that's where, where it all starts, really with the death of Christ. So much so that when in the generation following the death of Christ, Paul started to write, and John started to think, and Luke started to put it down.

[15:55] And they began to show how this point of annihilation in human existence becomes the point on which the whole thing is built.

And the difficulty with this is, of course, for our world, is that I think it's the only point from which you can understand the Christian faith. I don't think you can understand the Christian faith in terms of things are good, but they could be better.

I only think you can understand the Christian faith when you see the total hollowness and emptiness and failure and dereliction and hopelessness of human existence, individual human existence.

And experience that for yourself, that you begin to understand what it's all about. That's why I read the Globe and Mail last week, and I keep looking, you know, to see what sign there is of hope in the Globe and Mail.

And it declares dividends and profits and all those things. But it's something else that I'm looking for. And there was this really interesting article.

[17 : 14] I don't know if you saw it or not, but it was last Monday, a week ago yesterday. No, no, it wasn't. It was just, I guess, the day before yesterday. And it talks about business and society.

And it, in a sense, pulls the rug out from under any optimism in terms of business. And I'd like you to read about it.

It talks about business leaders. And it says, in our, the way we have structured our world, the leaders we have are business people. They are the people who give leadership to our world. And if they don't know what they're doing, if they don't know where they're going, then our world doesn't know where it's going because we're all following them. We're all going to university to learn to be like them.

And so he writes about the business leaders. And he says, who are these business leaders? At once so ingenious and so unaware of their new responsibility.

[18 : 20] Decent people, as already described. But most of them astonishingly narrow. Substantially ignorant of literature, history, art, music, philosophy.

Uninhibited by religious absolutes. And restrained only by what they are pleased to call a value system. That without some, and that without some philosophical or religious base.

Is thin cord indeed. Too many of them. Too many of them. Are philosophical. Anorexics. And are destined to remain so.

Because for them. Their lives and their labors. Are one and the same. The 60 hour weeks. Marked by triumphs. Over competitors.

Suppliers. And occasionally fellow executives. A life not much different from indentured servitude. And incessant pressure from peers, subordinates and shareholders.

[19 : 27] To achieve in the technological battle. No time to think about wider implications. No motivation to do so.

Thus they are ill-equipped. To take on a job of such great importance. One that is theirs by our default. What of the few serving executives.

And the few graduating neophytes. Who understand that we have an awful problem. It seems that they are dropping out. Five years ago.

Five percent of executives who lost their jobs. Elected not to return to corporate life. They opted out. Many went in search of real communities.

Made up of real people. Hoping for and often finding a better lifestyle. Today more than 20 percent are leaving. The big business apple.

[20 : 25] And all of them with a look on their faces that says. They found a worm. At the same time. Most of our best young people. Are looking at big corporate life.

And quickly choosing the alternatives. In particular. Entrepreneurship. Manpower planners. And major U.S. corporations. See this crunch coming.

As little as 10 years from now. Best we Canadians worry as well. Because we have set up a situation. In which. We must keep our best.

In the place where they are needed. We need them to help us. Remake our organizations. To make them more humane. To help all of us.

Who serve in corporate life. See the wider implications of our actions. To crusade. To keep our rhetoric aligned with reality.

[21 : 23] To refuse delivery of posturing nonsense. And to insist on the truth. As our organizations. Our communities go.

So goes our society. That is our problem. And our challenge. That organizations operate with more wisdom. And farsightedness.

Than the latest clever management technique. We have to get beyond the empty rhetoric. Of corporate vision. And define corporate culture.

With the sure recognition. That we are talking about where we live. We have to fill the positions of leadership. With people who know this.

And see the bottom line. And as a means. To a community and social end. Rather than an end in itself. We still have an opportunity.

[22 : 19] Let us for a while. Leave aside leadership theories. Team building. Managing by walking around. And searching for excellence. And all of the curious conceit.

That is called management science. Instead let us redefine our organizations. In the reality that they are our communities. And bring to bear on their wrenching problems.

The wider range of human knowledge. That is there for the taking. And let us ask the best people to stay a while. Coping with free trade over the next ten years.

May be the least of our worries. What we are really up against. Is building a post-industrial society. That works. The management theory for the 1990s.

Is organization equals community. Well I take that to be a kind of secular parable. Of the profound need.

[23 : 18] To say something. At the most basic level. Of our lives. And I take. The reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To be that which needs to be said. This whole. This whole article. Is built around the fact. That organizations are communities. And communities are made up of people. And that somehow you've got to provide meaning for people.

Well. I think that. That that's why. What we're doing here. If I might say so. In our own modest way. One with another. Is to try and create a community.

That is concerned for truth. That is concerned. That we really deal with. What the issue is. And the issue is.

That sense of meaning. And sense of belonging. And sense of purpose. That belongs to us. And which we pretend we've got. When we know we haven't.

[24 : 20] You know. It's the. It's the. We're living a kind of. Christian disciples. Before. The crucifixion. And then when the crucifixion takes place.

Despair enters in. But. You see. That's not what the gospel is about. The gospel is about. That when the crucifixion. It takes place. Then the whole basis. Of an entirely. New world. Begins. And that new world.

Begins. With the resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the dead. And when you reach the point. Of utter despair. And hopelessness. You are at the precise point. At which you recognize.

That the kingdom to be built. Is not a kingdom of this world. But a kingdom of God. And that the kingdoms of this world. The corporations. And all the entities.

[25 : 13] Of our. Social and cultural. And business life. Have to be. In a sense. Toy models. Of a far greater kingdom. Which it is.

God's purpose. To bring. Through people. Who are in touch. With. The truth. And the reality. Of the gospel. And the truth. And the reality.

Of the gospel. Are. Are. Is what. What the disciples. Came to recognize. Just. Let me finish with this. I. I'm just about.

Look. What happens. You see. Is. That Christ. Is crucified. And hope. Drains away. There isn't any. Because that's how they understood death.

They didn't. They didn't. They didn't. Ask any more questions. That is the end. There's nothing more. There is no hope. Left. Right. But then you see. What happens is.

[26 : 11] People began to realize. That the death of Christ. Was not. Outside of God's purpose. But was the exact. And precise. Focus.

Of God's purpose. And if you want to know. What the history of the world. Is about. And what God's purpose is. The focus of that purpose. Is revealed. In the death of Christ. Christ. Where a good man.

A totally good man. Is crucified. And instead of despair. Coming out of that. You begin to see. That. That's the center.

Of the beginning. Of. The gospel. And that's why. You know. The death of Christ. Occupies two-fifths. Of the gospel of Matthew.

The death of Christ. Occupies three-fifths. Of the gospel of Mark. The death of Christ. Occupies one-third. Of the gospel of Luke. And one-half. Of the gospel of John.

[27 : 06] Is all concerned. With the death of Christ. And when you come. To the epistle. To the Romans. You find. That this mystery. Of the death of Christ.

Is encapsulated. When Paul writes. Perhaps. For a good man. One would dare to die. But God. Commends his love. To us. In that while we were. Yet sinners. Christ. Died. For us. So that instead of it. Being a disaster. This is the beginning. Of a whole new purpose. Of God. Which begins. With the death of Christ. And when Paul writes. To the Corinthians. He said. Your leaders. If they had understood. What life was all about. The leaders of your community. The political leaders. And the religious leaders. If they had known. And they didn't. They would not have crucified. The Lord of glory. [28 : 01] They did. What they saw. Had to be done. And they crucified him. But they didn't understand. What they were doing. And it's not getting Christ. Out of the way. That opens the way ahead.

It's recognizing. That in Christ. There is the only way ahead. And so. When Paul writes. To the Galatians. He said. I know what you think. You think. Cursed is he. That hangs on a tree. Well you're right. Our curse. Is on him. And by his death. On the tree. A new beginning. Starts. And in Ephesians. He said. We were a long way. From God. But we have been brought near. By the death of Christ. Here we see. What God is up to. We begin to understand. His purpose. When writing to the Philippians. It says. What did Jesus do? [28 : 58] He thought it not robbery. To be equal with God. But made himself. Of no reputation. Became obedient. Unto death. Even death. On a cross.

Because that's where. It was all to begin. With Christ's death. On the cross. And in Colossians. It talks about. What Christ did. On the cross. He delivered us. From the. Dominion of darkness. Into the kingdom. Of his dear son. So you see. What. What. What. What. For at first. Was. The grounds. For the despair. Of the disciples. They began to see. Was the basis. For the hope. Of the disciples. Of the disciples. Of the disciples. That even. Death. Death. Itself. Did not. Frustrate. The purpose. Of God. But gave. A focus. To the purpose. Of God. [29 : 54] And having. Accomplished that. In obedience. To the father. On the third day. God raised him. From the dead.

You see. Well we in our society. As this. New. As this Globe and Mail article. Points out. We're sensitive. That there is a profound. Problem. But we're ignorant. That there is a profound. Answer. And that answer. Is in the purpose of God. Revealed. In. The death of Christ. On the cross. Why did he die? He died. On the cross. In order. That he might. Bring. Life. To a world. That lived. Under the tyranny. Of death. And you see. The whole of the Christian church. Is built around this. Christ says. Take this bread. Take this wine. [30 : 51] In remembrance. Of my death. When you go to join the church. Why do you join it? By. Dying. In baptism. And coming alive again.

So that it's at this point. That the change is made. It's at the point. Of total human despair. That the purpose of God emerges. And we have to come to that point. In order to see that. And that's why. When Paul. Went to the Corinthians. He said. I don't have anything to tell you. You're wise. You're sophisticated. You're the. The supreme civilization. Of the whole of history. To this point. But as far as I'm concerned. I'm determined to know nothing among you. Save Jesus Christ. And him crucified. Because this is where it all begins. Well. I've gone on too long. I'll carry on next week. With Luke 24. Let me say a brief prayer. And we'll quit. [31 : 46] Our God. Help us to understand. How this utter absolute. And eternal disaster. From human perspective. Becomes the basis. Of a whole new kingdom. A whole new creation. That begins. With Christ's death on the cross. And you're raising him. From that death. To new life. Bring us to that place. Through baptism. Through communion. In our own personal lives. Bring us to that place. That we might share that kingdom. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.