

Awe at the Cross

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. My name is James, and I heard some troubling news recently. The shops were all out of Easter eggs.

I know, there was groaning. Thank you, Brian, for sharing my sympathies. I was worried. But don't worry. I've got a way to fix it. We're going to make our own Easter eggs today.

I looked up the recipe online, and I've got all the ingredients I believe that we'll need. So, the ingredients. Now, I thought, when I was setting out to make Easter eggs, not everybody can eat Easter eggs, so we're going to have to just be a little bit careful with the ingredients.

But the things that I read is that you need sugar. So I've got my sugar from home, just a little bit there. You can tell my wife likes to do some baking. There's cocoa butter.

Well, I don't actually know what that is, but I've got buttery margarine spread, so that's close enough. I've got full cream milk. Full cream milk. I actually have that. That's good. There's lecithin.

[1 : 05] Does anybody know what lecithin is? No, nobody knows what that is, so I didn't bring it, because I actually don't have any. It needs cocoa and vanilla. Vanilla flavoring imitation.

Okay. But I think one of the problems is a number of people in this world are trying to be healthy, trying to be fit people, and so sugar doesn't really fit into the diet, so I think we probably need to put this one back.

We're not going to make chocolate with sugar. And dairy. Is anybody allergic or intolerant to dairy? Yeah. No, I'll put this away. I'll put this away for you.

Just for you, Aiden. Okay. So, okay. Here we go. I'm going to make chocolate out of these three ingredients. And I'm definitely not going to make a mess. Okay. So we'll put a bit of...

How much cocoa powder? Lots. Lots. Thanks, Libby. I'm so concerned now. Okay. There's a... I don't know if you can see that on the camera. Here we go. Imitation flavoring.

[2 : 02] I'm thankful for Queen. You know, these guys do wonderful colors. Again, lots? I'm hearing loads. Okay. Okay. Drops.

How about a good splash? There we go. And this is going to taste great, isn't it? This is going to be the best. Who needs coals and woolies? They're missing out. I'll tell you what.

And then just a good... Just mix that together. Does anybody want to come try this? It's not very good.

Now... Oh, it's bitter. There's no sugar in it. There's no sugar in it. Thank you. I'm just going to...

Sorry. In our search for the best chocolate, something that everyone could have, something that, you know, people who are allergic to dairy and who are trying to be healthy and not eat sugar...

[3 : 02] I've taken out some key ingredients. I've watered it down so much so that it's not good for anything. It's not good for eating. I've taken the stuff that's made it good.

I wonder, as we come to Easter and the cross, has Easter been watered down? Have we lost awe at Easter?

The fear and wonder of Jesus dying in our place. And without fear and wonder, Easter has lost its goodness to us. We lose our fear of God.

We lose our need for Jesus. We lose our wonder of God, showing us His amazing grace, and we end up chasing things that look wonderful. Today is Good Friday.

And in the weeks leading up to Easter, we've been looking at Jesus' final days. His last supper with His disciples, the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prepared to be crucified. And we've seen that awe that we need to have in God, awe, the combination of fear and wonder.

[4 : 07] And when we take away these two things, just like taking away crucial ingredients, it just ruins it, and we're left with nothing good. And so as we see the crucifixion of Jesus today, we're going to see two types of responses.

We're going to see the wrong response and then the right response as we are called to have fear and wonder, making up awe of God. And the challenge for us today as we seek to restore our awe of God is to check that it's not a watered down, sanitized version with the heart ripped out, with those key ingredients of the crucifixion ripped out.

Let me pray for us as we have a look at Matthew 27. Heavenly Father, we thank you for today. We thank you for the chance to stop, to gather as a church, and to remember that your Son died for us. Be with us today, Lord. Remind us afresh of the fear and wonder that we have. Lead us to have awe of you, Lord. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. We're in Matthew 27. Have your Bibles open, please. And we're going to start by seeing the wrong responses to Jesus. Firstly, we're going to see Pilate and his wife.

[5 : 27] Pilate and his wife both respond to Jesus out of fear. So from verse 19, while Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him a message. Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered greatly in a dream because of him.

Pilate's wife suffered greatly in a dream. We actually don't know any more details than this. I'd really like to know those details. We can fill it in. But all we can say with confidence is that she wanted Pilate to avoid Jesus because he was innocent and because she was afraid of suffering and more suffering.

So she's responding to Jesus out of fear. Pilate himself, well, he didn't listen to his wife. That was his first mistake. But instead, motivated by his fear of the crowd, again, he's fearful just like his wife. He's motivated by fear. Verse 20, Verse 24, When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water.

He washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, I am innocent of this man's blood. He said, it is your responsibility. Pilate was the governor of a city, and he would be easily replaced if this city turned into a riot, if there was an uproar.

[6 : 53] And so he calms it down out of fear of his own position, out of fear of an uproar. He's operating from fear just like his wife.

And so Barabbas is released. Jesus is sent to be flogged and crucified. And the soldiers mock Jesus. They dress him up.

They pretend that he is the king. And they beat him. Crucifixion is not enough when you are an enemy of Rome. You must be utterly humiliated. He was humiliated so that those who knew him, those who were associated with Jesus, they would want to cut all ties.

The Pharisees, those who were calling for Jesus to be killed, they themselves are operating out of fear. They were operating out of fear and self-interest.

They wanted Jesus dead because he was too radical. He was countercultural. He was teaching people that they shouldn't be listening to the Pharisees, that the Pharisees actually weren't following God.

[7 : 59] And so the Pharisees were fearful of the changes that Jesus wanted to bring, to know a God who loved them. And so they killed him. And then, when Jesus was hanging on that cross, they mocked him further.

Verse 39, those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself.

Come down from the cross. If you are the son of God, in the same way, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders mocked him. He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself.

He's the king of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him. For he said, I am the son of God.

The Pharisees rile up the crowd to mock Jesus and they heap abuse on him. And we see this build up from a number of different people of mocking responses, of fearful responses leading to it.

[9 : 05] But into this moment, while Pilate, while the Pharisees, while the crowd are all against Jesus, we see the right response. We see that things just cannot stay as they are.

We see the heavens respond, we see the earth respond, and we see the right response to Jesus.

Verse 45, From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over the land.

The heavens respond to the son of God dying on the cross. Darkness comes across the land as the people have been unable to see that Jesus is the son of God.

It becomes literally dark until Jesus cries out in his final moments. Cries out to his father. Alone, his friends have all fled.

He's been betrayed, and mocked, abused, spat on, cursed. But this moment, this is what Jesus had come to do.

[10:12] And in his death, he defeats death. And when he rises on Sunday, he brings life. Not only had the heavens closed over with Jesus on the cross, now the temple that has a massive curtain in it, the curtain is torn in two.

This curtain, which was designed to separate God from people and people from God, because God is holy, and only one person a year could go into that innermost place and come in with blood because they were sinful.

Now that curtain is torn in two. No sacrifice is ever needed again because the sacrifice has been laid on the cross. That temple is defunct.

Its job is done because Jesus, in his death, has defeated death. Verse 51, the earth shook, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open.

The bodies of many people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. The heavens respond by closing over and becoming dark.

[11:18] The earth responds by shaking. Shaking so much so that these tombs open up and Jesus, in his death, defeats death and people who were dead come back to life.

Jesus had previously raised people to life, but even in his death, the doors of death are broken open and people are brought back to life.

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The temple is torn in two. Jesus' death has shifted everything. And two small groups of people, two small groups of people, see and understand what's happened.

verse 55, many women were there watching from a distance. They'd followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

[12:24] Despite all the men running away, these women have remained faithful. They've seen Jesus in his power and in his humility. And they will see him in his resurrection and they will be the first to proclaim the gospel.

And there's one other group, one other small group who has the right response, who sees Jesus for who he is. Verse 54, when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified.

And they exclaimed, surely he was the son of God. The centurion and those guarding him. Well, these are the soldiers of Pilate under Pilate's control.

These are the soldiers who had taken Jesus from Pilate, those who had beaten and mocked him, those who had pretended he was the king. Something rocks them to their core.

When they saw what had happened, they were terrified. Terror, absolute terror. We have killed him. We've killed the son of God. We are the ones who put Jesus to death.

[13:39] What's going to happen to us? We've seen the heavens close over. We've seen the tombs open up. Is God going to strike us down where we stand? And they exclaim, surely he was the son of God.

They have a terrified response of fear, but they also respond with wonder. Surely he was the son of God. They see in his death no ordinary execution.

The sun had darkened, the earth had shook, it was no ordinary power. They hadn't heard from an angel or a prophet, but they had seen God's power in Jesus on the cross.

And these people had awe. the centurion, the soldiers. They had this combination of fear and wonder.

Fear because they realized what they had done. But wonder because what they had heard about Jesus was right all along. He is the son of God.

[14:43] Awe is fear and wonder. And at Easter this year, we run the risk of missing out on these two key ingredients to seeing who Jesus is.

There's two things, awe and wonder. When you take away one, you lose awe. And you lose the heart of the good news of Jesus' death on the cross.

Because the good news of Easter is a combination of these two, fear and wonder. God is right to punish us. We are right to fear God, fear Him for our sin, for our rebellion.

But we don't need to fear Him. Because in His great love for us, His son died in our place. And so we can wonder at His amazing love for us.

When we lose the fear of God, we lose the awareness of our sin. My sin, my mistakes, the people I hurt, they just become something to move on from.

[15 : 44] I'm not going to dwell in my mistakes. I'm not going to consider that I could be at fault. I'm just going to move on. I'm going to hope I don't get cancelled. As long as my sin isn't on a big stage slapping someone in front of an international audience, I can be guaranteed I can escape the repercussions of my own sin.

I can hide from my issues. I can be known as a good person. I'm a good guy. Unless I actually ask those closest to me. Or even ask the God who knows me best.

In the current political climate as we head towards an election, reporters and politicians on all sides are pulling up the dirt of the past and saying, look at this. This person's terrible.

Look at their sin. But can you imagine someone doing that to you? Actually looking through all the people you'd hurt, all of your sin, all of your innermost darkened thoughts and bringing them to the light of day.

I'm pretty fearful of that actually happening. That would be terrifying. Terrifying for you to know actually what I'm like. I'm so thankful for my God who knows who I am and yet loves me.

[17 : 00] God sees all of who we are. He knows how darkened and terrible our hearts are and we can pretend it's fine. We can hide from that but the right response is like the centurions to be terrified before God but also not to stay there.

To move to wonder that He would forgive. When we lose wonder at God's amazing love we're just left with fear and so we can seek all kinds of other remedies to make us feel better.

I'm just left with fear so I'm going to chase success to bring wonder. I'm going to deal with these issues of fear that I have so I'm going to make myself successful or I'm going to escape.

I'm going to chase being wonderful because there is nothing wonderful in life other than God and yet God says be in awe of me. Be fearful because of who you are but wonder because of my amazing grace for you.

The cross is the centerpiece of Christianity. When we lose the importance of Easter when we lose both the fear and the wonder it just all falls apart and it can just leave a bitter taste in our mouth.

[18 : 21] And so what we're going to do right now we're going to seek to restore our awe of God. We're going to do both of those things. We're going to sit in fear of God and we're going to sit in wonder and praise of God.

We're going to come to a time of the Lord's Supper now and we're going to in a moment say a confession together, celebrate the Lord's Supper and then we are going to stand and sing praise and be in wonder for our God.

So a confession is going to come up on the screen. Let's say this confession together.

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you made all things and you call everyone to account. With shame we confess the sins we have committed against you in thought, word and deed.

We rightly deserve your condemnation. we turn from our sins and are truly sorry for them. They are a burden we cannot bear.

[19 : 34] Have mercy on us, most merciful Father, for the sake of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Forgive us all that is past. Let me continue.

We're going to continue now. I will say the unbolded words and we'll say the bold words together. Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. He is worthy of all praise. And we pray you are worthy our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power.

For you created all things and by your will they existed and were created. Therefore with all those gathered around your throne in heaven, we lift our voices to praise you saying together, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come.

We praise you especially for your son, our saviour Jesus Christ, who by his death on the cross and rising to new life, offered the one true sacrifice for sin and obtained an eternal deliverance for his people.

[20 : 51] Together, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive praise and honour and glory and power forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen.