

Crucified King

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. As some of you will be aware, I've been away on long service leave and this is the first time I've preached since June. That could be dangerous. But to come back in, in this series and to preach in this series at the most crucial point of it, I consider to be a great joy and privilege. I was listening to Dennis earlier, I was listening earlier, coming to Christ in his 20s. I was 23 when I discovered the answer to the crucial question that we are looking at today. When I looked at this text, there's multiple different angles that you could take on it. I considered maybe doing a sermon on political power, given that we were at elections yesterday and I've considered a whole range of different things.

But the crucial question of this passage is why did Jesus of Nazareth have to die? Why did he have to die? And I was 23 when I discovered the answer to that question for the first time. I had grown up attending churches like potentially you. I had read the Bible, in fact, a number of times up to the age of 23. I knew a bunch of Christian practices and rituals.

I knew many Christian truths. And I knew that Jesus was central to everything. But my overall impression was that if I served Jesus, then Jesus would serve me. If I approved of him, he would approve of me. If I said sorry to him, then he would forgive me. And if I kept saying sorry to him and providing at the point of my death, I'd said sorry more than I'd had sins, then I would be okay.

I was 23, sitting in a scenario not unlike this, and I discovered for the first time in my life, it was actually about him and not about me. It was all about what he had done and not what I was trying to do. So what we're looking at over the next three Sundays is what is central to the Christian faith.

And I make no assumptions whatsoever, at all. You could have walked into this building for the first time, or you could have been sitting in a building like this all of your life, and you still may not get it.

[2 : 5 9] Why did Jesus have to die? That's the crucial question. Lord Tennyson, the 19th century English poet, described Jesus' life as more beautiful than the greatest of his miracles. Very few people in history have ever dared to question the outstanding nature of the character of Jesus of Nazareth.

And on top of an exemplary life, his teaching gave rise to the values of Western civilization and have impacted virtually every culture across the globe for over 2,000 years. Transforming lives and cultures.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself. His influence is without doubt greater than any other human being that has ever lived.

So why did Jesus of Nazareth end his life on a Roman cross like a hardened criminal?

It makes no sense. And it's the answer to that question that drives us to the very heart of the Christian faith, the heart of this church, and why we declare that we treasure Jesus above all else.

[4 : 3 3] So I've got three points on this sermon on the St. Paul's app. The wickedness of humanity, the will of God, and the willingness of Jesus. That's the trajectory for us today. These words in front of us are the account of the Apostle John, one of Jesus' closest followers.

They are an eyewitness account of his trial and his death. One of the noticeable differences with John's gospel, Passion of the Christ, noticeable in his, compared to Matthew, Mark and Luke, is how much time John gives to the recording, the actual trial of Jesus.

And scholars say the difference with John and the others is that John wants to put an awful lot of focus in implicating all of humanity in the crucifixion of Jesus.

First half of chapter 18, Judas betrays Jesus out of greed. In the middle of chapter 18, the disciples desert him out of cowardice and disillusionment.

Chapter 19, the religious authorities murder him out of envy. The soldiers torture and mock him out of heartless ignorance.

[6 : 02] And Pilate washes his hands of him in order to please his constituents. Greed, envy, cowardice, people-pleasing, holding Jesus at arm's length.

Everyone here is implicated in his death despite the fact that his innocence is without doubt. Three times, which if you know biblical language, three times is a word, is an emphasis.

Three times, Pilate insists that Jesus is innocent. 1838, I find no basis for a charge against him. 1904, I find no basis for a charge against him.

1906, I find no basis for a charge against him. The innocence of Jesus is beyond doubt. 1906, but also through this account, as we've seen through the rest of John, the status of Jesus is well attested.

From the very first chapter of this gospel, he's been declared as the creator God entering this world to fix it. He's healed the sick.

[7 : 19] He's turned water into wine. He's raised the dead. He's fed the hungry. He's walked on water. At every point, his words are not mumbled at all.

He declares himself equal with God. He says that he and the father are one and that anyone who has seen him has seen God himself.

He declares that he is the way, the truth and the life. And despite the evidence of his life and his works, everyone joins together to rid the earth of him.

For instance, the religious elite do what the religious establishment over the world always do. And that is they maintain the status quo. They're interested in their power and their influence.

Their hypocrisy is revealed as they cry out, we have no king. We have no lord. We have no master, but Caesar himself. They hated Caesar. They are jealous that more and more people are turning their allegiance to Jesus.

[8 : 25] And so they wanted him dead. They are told quite clearly by Pilate that he's innocent. Pilate offers us to release him in verse 29, verse 39, and they demand instead the release of a convicted criminal.

Barabbas, much more than some translations say he was a robber. He was much more than a robber. He's guilty of insurrection. He has led an uprising against the Roman Empire.

He wanted to be king himself and he's got blood on his hands. He committed murder in the process. The soldiers here treat Jesus as a comic figure to be ridiculed, nothing more than a swear word when things don't go white.

Pilate does what politicians the world overdo. He knew Jesus was innocent and at the end of the day his reputation was more that was things that was on the line for him. That's the thing that he cared about.

When expedience demanded otherwise, he caved in. He abandoned principle for popularity. He's a people pleaser.

[9 : 42] He knew what truth is but showed he hated truth and sided with a false head because truth was going to cost him too much. John is trying to help us see here if we were there, we would have joined in too.

That's what John wants us to see. You and I are as guilty as they. And the dark secret that is being pointed to here is that it was the wickedness of humanity that resulted in the death of Jesus.

There is something in every one of us that is unable to side with truth and righteousness at the crucial moments in life. You see, the death of Jesus reveals the deepest, darkest secrets of us all. John mentioned it really clearly back in chapter 3, verse 19. This is the verdict, talking about Jesus. Light has come into the world of all the world of all the world views that exist in our world.

The Christian faith presents the most negative of the human condition. The most negative. Another part of the New Testament puts it like this.

[11 : 35] Ephesians chapter 2. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient, all of us who lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.

That's the human condition. Spiritually dead. Not dying, not crippled. Dead. Unable to do anything to help ourselves. And it's universal.

All, it says there. He's not describing here some decadent, depraved segment of society, but all of humanity from top to bottom.

All, spiritually dead apart from Jesus. What does it mean to be dead in transgressions and sins?

Well, I would suggest here from Ephesians 2, it means to be enslaved.

Notice the word followed there in verse 2 and verse 3. The word means mastered to be controlled by something.

[12 : 49] The reason we are dead in transgressions and sins is that we are as helpless as a dead body.

Completely controlled. Completely mastered. Unable to move. Unable to act on our own. The key idea, it's there in verse 3, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. The term our flesh in verse 3 is literally referring to not bones and skin and stuff, but it's referring to self-centered human nature.

That's the thing that drives us. That's the thing that masters us and controls us. According to the Bible, the reason we are dead in transgressions and sins, the reason we are slaves to sin, the reason we are bound by sin, is because the human heart is profoundly centered upon itself and not its creator.

The 16th century church reformer and theologian Martin Luther put the condition of the heart quite succinctly. He described it as curved in on itself.

[14 : 14] Luther said that our nature is so deeply curved in on itself that it wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks to use all things and all people, even God himself, for its own sake.

Now it's pretty obvious when you listen to that statement from Luther that self-centeredness can make you into a cruel person. It's not hard to identify the dictators, the tyrants in history.

They want to get things done their way and they'll do whatever it takes, even immoral things, in order to make sure that they consistently stay on top.

What is less obvious for us is that self-centeredness also makes us, for the majority of us, moral people. If everything is about my need to feel good about myself, there's no better way to feel good about yourself than to be a good person.

Self-centeredness drives most people into being good, trying hard to serve the needy, being a good child to a parent or a good parent to children, a good friend that is always there to assist whenever I'm needed.

[15 : 33] What lies beneath all of that is a self-centeredness where the driving motive of the heart is I am trying to make myself feel good. I want to receive the applause of others or I want to fill this aching void in my heart.

But here's the other one for us. Self-centeredness could also make you quite a religious person. We can devote ourselves to obeying God and turning up to church, reading the Bible, praying, giving and doing the sort of things that we are doing right now.

Did you see the irony and the hypocrisy at the beginning of what was just read out to us by Aidan? Chapter 18, verse 28, the religious leaders won't go into the palace, a Gentile palace.

They wanted to hand Jesus over to the Gentiles so that they could rush off to church. You kill him, we've got some ceremonies to do, we've got some religion to practice.

Their lives are about rules in order to please God, all good and right things to do. Religion is about doing good things and expecting God to come through for you in the way you want him to.

[17 : 06] Religion puts you at the centre and leaves God to one side. It's so ironic that so many people even get into the Christian faith in order to have God serve them rather than for them to serve God.

How do you know? When things don't work out, before them too, you draw back from God. And yet Christianity is the only world religion that has as a central belief, we don't do anything for salvation, he's done it all for us.

And self-centeredness clicks to every aspect of your life. life. And if you see any of it in your heart, it's a revelation of just deeply how wicked the human heart is.

C.S. Lewis, the Oxford professor and author, wrote, there is nothing more enslaving and miserable than self-centeredness. He wrote that it is hell which has begun in us that will ultimately take us to hell.

So why did Jesus have to die? Because of the wickedness of humanity. And we need to see ourselves in this narrative.

[18 : 31] But secondly, Jesus also died because of the will and the purpose of God.

The narrative of John's gospel is that Jesus suffered as God's royal king and that it was God's intention for Jesus to die on the cross. That is, the crucifixion of Jesus is not a travesty of justice or he was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It was no mere accident of human history. It was the climactic hour. It was the crowning purpose, the moment of Jesus' glory and of God's glory.

That's what it was. In John 12, he speaks of the hour of his death and he indicates that he will be lifted up on a cross for which he says will be the hour of my glory.

It will be the moment where the magnificence and the beauty and the worth and the character of God would be on full display. It's going to go viral in this moment.

[19 : 34] You want to know who God is? You will see him on a cross. You want to know what he's like? You'll see him on a cross. John 13, he washes the feet of his disciples and tells them that he will die out of love for the whole world.

John 17, as he speaks of his death, he declares again, it will be the hour of his glory. John 18, as the soldiers come to arrest him, the soldiers themselves, did you notice this last week?

The soldiers themselves, when he says, I am the one you're looking for, they bowed down in front of him immediately. Get up, guys, you've got to arrest me.

That's what you're here for. he shows himself to be one of absolute authority over all, including the arresting party.

And yet, he allows them to bind him. And as we just read in John 19, Jesus says to Pilate, you have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

[20 : 48] Pilate, the representative of the largest empire, the most powerful empire in the world at the time. As you read through the Gospels, you see again and again that Jesus heads to his death, knowing it is the purpose and the will of God.

It was the deliberate desire of God throughout history that his son, Jesus, would come into his creation and suffer and die and rise and reign.

It was no mistake. It wasn't a tragedy. God's intention was for his glory to be displayed through the wicked plans of humanity to nail Jesus upon a Roman cross.

In chapter 19, verse 5, Pilate thought Jesus was a joke, made a spectacle, dressed him up. And when he brought Jesus, when Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, to the gathering crowd, not, here's your man, here is the man.

Definite article, the man. Pilate's mocking Jesus to the crowd, dressed up with all these fake robe, look at the man, the quintessential human being.

[22 : 21] And then in verses 13 and 14, the drama concludes, out on the pavement, Pilate takes the official seat, declaring his judgment on behalf of the Roman Empire, and what comes out of his mouth?

your king. Not this pathetic loser, your king. At every point here, Jesus is in control.

We are told his final pronouncement came at the sixth hour, that is Pilate's final pronouncement, on the eve of the Passover, the very hour, the very hour that the priest began to slaughter the Paschal lambs, the Passover lambs at the temple.

Jesus, the king of the Jews, the son of God, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, timed his condemnation to his death and to death perfectly.

God's will be saved. They were all poor in God's great drama to save the world.

[23 : 38] As 1 Timothy tells us, here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Jesus died because of the wickedness of humanity.

He died because of the will of God. Yet those two observations don't get to the deepest answer. The willingness of Jesus out of love for humanity.

To get to the heart of the issue, I want to turn to a passage in the first part of the Bible. It's repeatedly pointed to for an explanation of Jesus' death. Isaiah chapter 53.

It's writing, this is Isaiah, seven centuries before the crucifixion of Jesus. Isaiah 53 verse 4. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, but each has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[24 : 58] What we have in Isaiah 53 is substitutionary language. Did you see it? Pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

The punishment that's brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And did you see the language of God's purposes and plan in this? Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. We all, that is you and me as well, like sheep have gone astray, each to his own, turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. The word transgression is a word that means willful rebellion against God. Iniquity is a word that means to bend, to bend over, to contort.

It's referring to the brokenness of humanity. Jesus is carrying God's just punishment, his just judgment for our human rebellion and iniquity and sin to the cross.

[26 : 21] That is Jesus' trades place with us. When John first points to the person of Jesus, as he comes, the very first time he gets to identify the person of Jesus in this gospel.

In chapter one, he says, behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is a reference to this passage in Isaiah where Jesus likened to the sheep going to the slaughter. He takes upon himself God's judgment for our sin. Jesus, fully God, fully man, Jesus, having lived a perfect life, goes to death on a cross and carries God's just judgment for every wrong, every wrong thing that you and I have ever done or thought and also for all the right things that we have failed to do, such as love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.

And we get a glimpse of what he does for us in this passage. He trades place with Barabbas. Barabbas was the only man in history who could ever see, say, Jesus has taken my place physically.

But in that, we're revealed here that Jesus takes our place spiritually. Barabbas was condemned to die and he was set free.

[28 : 03] I'm the one who deserves to be on that cross. I'm the one who deserves God's just anger. I deserve eternal punishment for my rebellion against God. And Jesus instead was delivered up for my offenses.

He was handed over to judgment for my sin. Jesus Christ is my substitute. He was satisfying the debt of divine justice and holiness.

The innocent one was bound and now to the cross. condemned to death so that the guilty one deserving of death might go free.

It's why John 3 16 is the most famous of Bible verses in this world. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. Such is love. The wickedness of humanity, the will of God, the willingness of Jesus out of love, declares that you and I are more sinful and deserving of wrath, more deeply broken and damaged than we would ever allow ourselves to contemplate.

[29 : 44] And yet at the same time we are more loved and affirmed than we could ever possibly dream.