

The Journey to the Cross

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the second section we read, Luke chapter 23, and that section, verses 26 to 34.

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus, and so on.

Now, as we're moving on through this gospel, the gospel of Luke, we are now coming very close to the end. Last Sunday night, as we were looking at this, we saw here the worst miscarriage of justice in human history, where King Herod and where Pilate and Herod both examined Jesus, both came to the exact same conclusion, he has done nothing worthy of death.

They both said, we find no fault, no guilt in this man, and they both said that he should actually go free. And so it's really quite an extraordinary thing.

It defies all human logic when you see that the Roman ruler, the Roman governor, and King Herod both said this man should go free, and yet they hand him over to crucifixion.

[1 : 23] The worst form of execution known. It really is quite extraordinary. And whenever, of course, Jesus is handed over, he is then being led away to the place where this awful sentence will be carried out.

Now, as the custom was at that time, the Persian who was to be crucified, they had to carry their own cross. They had to carry that beam of wood on which they were going to be stretched out. But we're told that there was this Persian, this man Simon of Cyrene, that they got hold off, they seized him, and they laid the cross on him to carry it behind Jesus.

And it's very obvious from this because we're told that in John, where we read that Jesus was carrying his own cross. So we know straight away what happened was that Jesus was no longer capable of carrying the cross.

Because what he's gone through for the last number of hours would break the strongest of all people. Jesus had suffered incredibly emotionally, physically, mentally, socially, in every conceivable way.

[2 : 38] You think just over these last few hours. First of all, he was betrayed by one of his disciples. Judas betrayed Jesus. Prior to that, there was the agony in Gethsemane.

Remember how he went away and he prayed? And as he was praying, the intensity, the agony of that period was so intense that he was sweating, as it were, drops of blood.

It was a fearful pressure point in the experience and in the life of Jesus. Then, following on from the betrayal, there was the forsaking by the disciples that they all forsook him and fled.

And you think about it, of what is happening, you think of the whole emotional aspect of it. If those closest to you in the world, one of them betrays you, another denies you with oaths and with curses, saying, that Jesus, he means nothing to me.

After all that Jesus had done for Peter. And then the intensity of Gethsemane. All these things. You think of the emotional impact that would have upon our Lord.

[3 : 52] And then you think of the beating and the mocking. And all that he endured while he was before the Sanhedrin and the mockery in the palace. And they were beating.

And we saw that before. That is, his face was marred beyond, it tells us that in the prophecy of Isaiah. That his face was beaten in such a way that he was beyond recognition.

His features were so distorted through the beatings that he had received. It wasn't like a slap. He was just being really abused. So he has undergone all that.

And then there's a trial in front of Pilate. And then the trial in front of Herod. And then being brought back. And then there's a sentence of death passed upon him, which is crucifixion.

And then there's the flogging. And as we saw last week in our flogging, in our Roman flogging, many people died under it. The flogging was so bad. That leather whip with bone and metal stuck into it.

[4 : 54] And very often people died under the flogging. It was so severe. So Jesus, for these number of hours, has endured all that. So you can understand how physically and mentally and emotionally, all these ways.

Then to carry this huge beam of wood just was beyond him. So that is why this man, Simon of Cyrene, was compelled to carry the cross.

Now, Cyrene, in today's place, would be in Tripoli, in Libya. And this man, there were a lot of actually Cyrenian Jews.

In fact, there was a Cyrenian synagogue in Jerusalem. And we read in Acts of the Apostles that some of the early Christians were Cyrenians.

So with Jesus at the front and this man, Simon, following behind, we read that there was a great number of people followed on behind Jesus.

[5 : 56] And it was for them, for many of the people in Jerusalem, this was a very heart-rending moment. And it's very obvious because we find that the women who are following, they are weeping.

And little wondered because here was this man who had done so much. In fact, he hadn't done anything but that which was good. He was a man who went around and taught in the most beautiful way.

He was a person who brought healing and help and goodness into people's lives. Every person that Jesus met with was the better of that meeting.

And it's an extraordinary scene. And it was one of the most heart-rending scenes to see the way he had been so abused and violated and then been carried out to his death.

It's little wonder. It would have touched any heart. And so there's this great crowd following and all these women. But we find that Jesus turns to the women who are actually weeping.

[7 : 03] And again, he makes a prophecy against Jerusalem. He's made many prophecies against Jerusalem. And they're not good prophecies. And it's extraordinary when you think because Jerusalem is the one place that should have been the seat of God's blessing and favor and privilege.

Here is a place above all places really on the earth that should have enjoyed the favor of God. The royal seat. And yet it's Jerusalem that is passing the sentence of death upon the Son of God.

And so we find that Jesus turns to these women. And he's saying to them, Look, don't weep for me. But weep for yourselves and for your children.

Now these women who are following there, we do not believe these are the women, the regular women who followed Jesus like Joanna and Mary of Magdalene and such like, who were disciples and tended to him and were part of his following everywhere.

We believe that these were just women who had come at this particular time and seen what was happening and were so affected by it. And Jesus, while he has suffered intensely and is going to suffer even more so in the next few hours, he turns to these women.

[8 : 27] And he says to them, You know, the rejection of me. This is really what he's saying. The rejection of me is worse than anything else.

However bad this may appear to you, by rejecting me, it's going to be even worse. What's going to happen? And so this is kind of the last prophecy that Jesus makes about Jerusalem.

And things are going to become so bad for Jerusalem that the wombs that never bear children and the breasts that never nurse children are actually going to be blessed.

Here's a reversal of the order of which the Jews normally saw as blessing. The Jews put great store and blessing upon children and Jesus is saying the order is going to be reversed.

And we know that that's exactly what happened in just a few short years in 70 AD when the Romans came against Jerusalem and destroyed it. That it was a merciless destruction.

[9 : 33] They slaughtered men, women, boys, girls. It didn't matter the age. It was a brutal time. Historians will tell us that they ran out of wood with so many crucifixions.

It was a time of sheer savagery and brutality. And that's what Jesus is saying to them. Don't weep for me.

Weep for yourselves and for your children because of what's going to happen. You see, it's the most awful thing at the end of the day to reject the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's the ultimate sin. A person who spends their whole life rejecting Jesus and dies rejecting Jesus, there is no way back. It is then into eternal death.

The rejection of Jesus to the point of death is really the unpardonable sin. There is no way back. And Jesus is saying to them, this is what it's going to be.

[10:35] And really, Jesus is saying to them, the real tragedy of this situation is misjudging who I am. And that's what they were doing.

They hadn't grasped who he was. So you see, my friends, the most important decision that we make in life is a decision that we make regarding Jesus because it has eternal consequences. Many of the decisions that we make from day to day, they might be big, they might be little, whatever, but they don't have eternal consequences. But this one does. What we do with Jesus has consequences for all eternity.

And you may say to yourself, I don't want to hear that. And you dismiss it. Well, if you dismiss it, you're making a decision which has an eternal consequence because you're saying, I don't want to face up to this.

I don't want to deal with it. Well, one day, you're going to have to deal with it because everybody is going to have to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This same Christ in all his glory and all his majesty.

[11:41] That glory and majesty which was veiled and hidden at that time. But we're all going to have to appear before. It's a day where there will be no excuses because everybody will be judged with total righteousness and unerring accuracy.

And so Jesus is taken away and then he says really like a kind of a proverb in verse 31. He says, For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?

And really, Jesus is saying here if they do this to someone who is innocent, what is going to happen to the guilty? In a sense, that's kind of what has been said here.

Now, you'll also notice that two other men, two other criminals are being led away at the same time to be put to death. And again, this is a fulfillment of the prophecy that he was numbered with the transgressors.

And so they come to this place. We read about it this place of crucifixion and this was a place where people were executed and it was a little hill. It was almost like it grew out of the ground and it looked like a skull.

[12:57] If you came along and you said, oh, hey, look, that kind of looks like a skull. Well, that's exactly what it looked like. In Aramaic, it was called Golgotha and in Latin, it was called Calvaria, which is where we get our name, Calvary.

And Luke tells us so simply that when they got there, they crucified him. Now, some people marvel at why the gospel writers spend so little time describing the crucifixion scene because all of them just say they crucified him.

Well, one of the things we've got to remember is that at this particular time, crucifixion was normal. Yes, it was held for slaves and the worst of criminals, but it was a form of execution, a normal form of execution.

And so at that particular time, just the bare minimum, the bare details are told and they crucified him. But you know, again, when we stop and we think about it, it really is extraordinary.

Here, as we said, the most wonderful person that this world has ever seen. And when you think they took his hands out and stretched out his hands and they ran the nails through these huge, big, blunt nails which had gone through tying, hammering, fixing him to that beam.

[14:19] And then, of course, that would be hammered into the wood and the cross. Then the other great big beam lifted up and his feet hammered in. And when you think of these hands, hands that had held the infants and blessed the infants, hands that had dealt with people in mercy and in love, hands that had been used to save people, hands that were held out in benediction blessing, hands that had been stretched out over Jerusalem where Jesus was saying, oh, he said, oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, oh, if only you would come to me.

Hands of invitation. And he was saying, just like the way that a hen will gather her brood to herself, just the way that you take all the little chicks and put them under the wing and keep them warm and keep them safe.

Jesus is saying, that's what I would love to do for you, but you won't have me. You're rejecting me. These hands, these precious hands, these are the hands that have been nailed.

Let us remember that these are still the hands today that are being held out to us in gospel invitation. What are you doing then, my dear friends, with this invitation?

These hands that are stretched out to you, are you going to ignore or reject or neglect or accept? You have to make that decision.

[15:58] Anyway, they tell us here that they crucified him and then we find that Jesus, it's amazing that as they crucify him, Jesus prays and he says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

It's very interesting while Jesus speaks from the cross seven times and while he is in intense agony because you think of what is happening and it kind of defies a thought, these awful nails just being hammered through and subsequently all that goes on with the crucifixion, that his prayer is not about himself or for himself but it is for others.

It was always for others. And he prays, Father, Father, forgive them. And that's very important as well to highlight here because when we go through painful experiences in life and when our life, our personal life is thrown upside down and things don't measure up and we can be hurt and we feel so sad and broken hearted and sometimes we say to ourselves, has God forgotten all about me? where is the heavenly Father in all that is happening here? Jesus never thinks like that. It's still Father.

It's a Father who has handed him over to all that is happening. Jesus knows at that moment that the Father could destroy the world and release Jesus just in an instant.

[17:40] but the Father has chosen not to. The Father has given the Son and Jesus knows that. And so there is no lack of distrust or lack of faith or lack of love in the heart of Jesus despite all that the Father is doing in him and to him.

And he still calls him Father. And that's a great encouragement to us when we're in the dark, when we're in pain, when we don't understand, let's remember that Jesus was there, that Jesus was in the dark.

And in fact, he plunges into greater darkness. We're not looking at that just now. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Into where he was plunged into that fearful darkness. And so we find that Jesus here is still full of faith. And he says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

We all need divine forgiveness. We all need Jesus' intercession for us. Because we're all constantly guilty of breaking God's law.

[18:59] We often sin and we're aware of it. But we often sin and we're oblivious to the fact. And my friend, let us remember this, that our sins of ignorance will not excuse us.

If we break the law of the land and we get caught, it's no excuse to say, well, I didn't actually know. It can happen. We can actually break the law and realize, and it's only when we break it and maybe get caught we realize, hey, I didn't know I was breaking the law.

That doesn't stand in court. If you say, well, I'm really sorry for what I did but I actually didn't know that I was breaking the law. They would say, well, whether you know it or not, you actually did break the law.

End of story. And so it is with regard to God's law. We cannot turn around at the end of the day and say, well, I didn't really know. Our sins fall into two categories.

Sins of ignorance, sins of omission, sins of commission. Sins where we sin, where we're aware of what we're doing and sins where we're unaware.

[20:15] But we need forgiveness for all our sin. Because every sin is deserving of God's wrath and curse. Now we know that some sins are more heinous than others in God's sight.

There's no doubt whatever. And we do know that there's a big difference between sinning in the knowledge of light and sinning ignorantly. And God recognizes that and is aware of these things. And that's what was happening here. They should have known that Jesus was the Son of God. Because these people were steeped in the law.

But they thought he was an imposter. father. And so Jesus is saying, father, forgive them. For they don't know what they're doing.

My friends, we need, as we said, divine forgiveness. You need it, I need it. Our life is full of sin. And we need forgiveness not for a few wrongs here and a few wrongs there.

[21 : 21] we need forgiveness for our entire being. Because we are sinners through and through. It's one of the most awful and yet most necessary discoveries where we come to see that we're sinners.

Have you come to that discovery? It's a difficult, it's a painful discovery. There's nobody but they acknowledge at one level or another that they do things that are wrong in life.

Nobody will go through life and have the audacity to say I have never done anything that's wrong. But to discover that even our best efforts are wrong, that sin stains and affects everything about us is a really painful discovery.

But that's how we really are. And that's why we need divine forgiveness. That's why we need to be forgiven and covered and cleansed. And the wonderful thing is that God is able to do that through Jesus.

This Jesus who prayed on the cross is the same Jesus who today is able to wash your sins and my sins away.

[22 : 39] Have you gone to him for cleansing, for forgiveness? If you haven't, then ask for the repentance spirit. We sang there in Psalm 51, that great psalm of confession.

And David was somebody who came to discover how awful sin was. And he's saying, Oh Lord, against you, you only have I sinned. And then he's saying, cleanse me from all my sin.

And he's saying, do thou with hyssop sprinkle me, I shall be cleansed. And so, yea, wash thou me, and then I shall be whiter than the snow. Do you know, when God forgives you your sin in Jesus Christ, that's how you become, whiter than the snow.

And I don't know anything whiter than the snow. When you see a bed of snow, when the snow has fallen, and you get up in the morning, it's this blanket of snow. Nobody's walked on it, nothing has affected it.

It is so white. Even white pillow slips or white sheets against it look decidedly dull and grey against the pure whiteness of snow. Well, the psalmist is saying, wash me so that I will be even whiter than the snow.

[23 : 57] Speaking of the purity that God brings into his people, when he cleanses them in Jesus Christ, nothing but the blood of Christ can bring that purity.

Let us ask, if you've never found or discovered that, then please seek so today. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we ask to enrich our lives and to bless our lives and to do us good.

We give thanks for the gospel of Jesus Christ, this great news. And we pray that if anybody in here has never tasted and seen for themselves that God is good, that today they may do so.

If we have never, if there's anyone here who has never really cried for that forgiveness, come in repentance, faith and repentance to the Lord. May they do so today and discover the freedom, the liberty of having had our sins forgiven.

Lord, bless us and keep us, shine thy face upon us, cleanse us from each and every sin, guide us in our way, and forgive us everything.

[25 : 06] In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen. Amen.