

John 18

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Date: 05 April 2015

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[0 : 00] Just a wee word to the young folk. I know that the holidays are on and quite a number are away. But we're aware that this time of year we talk of this as Easter holidays and we're very aware of what Easter means.

And it's a very important time for the Christian. And I want us to think of this word Easter today, just as I speak to you.

And there are, in the word, E-A-S-T-E-R, six letters. And in these six letters, the whole story is given to us.

So I want you to think of that. And I'll just, for three, four minutes, tell you that story with the letters. And it begins with the letter E for early. Very early one morning, some ladies who loved Jesus and had seen the body of Jesus taken down from the cross on Friday, just before sundown, and put into the grave very early on the first day of the week, which would be like a Sunday morning, decided to go and put spices on the body of Jesus in the grave.

So they were wondering what to do when they, A, arrived. Because they knew there was going to be a problem.

[1 : 31] Because a huge stone, a massive stone, had been put over the grave. It wasn't the kind of grave we have. It was more like a kind of cave.

So they were wondering what they would do when they arrived. But you know, when they arrived, yes, they got a terrible shock.

Because the huge stone that had been put in front of the grave was taken away. It had been rolled away. And more than that, an angel actually sat on the stone.

So no wonder they got a shock. And now that they were at the grave, and the grave was called the tomb, T.

So we have E for early, A for arrived, S for shock, T for the tomb. Now the tomb was open. The stone, as we say, had been rolled away.

[2 : 31] And they could go in. But then E for empty. The tomb, the grave, was empty. Jesus' body was gone.

The grave clothes that Jesus had been wrapped in were there. And in fact, the angel that sat on the stone said, See the place where the Lord lay.

And then the question is asked, Where did Jesus go? And that's our. He was risen.

He arose from the dead. And that is the great, wonderful news that we have. That Jesus is our risen saviour. That's what makes the Christian faith kind of different to all the other religions.

Because we have somebody who was put in a grave, and he rose. Death couldn't hold him. He beat death.

[3 : 34] He broke the power of death. And he rose up. And today, he is on the throne in heaven. And he is our Lord and our saviour.

It's the greatest news in the world. So remember Easter. E for early. A for arrived. S for the shock. T for the tomb. E for empty. And R, risen. So when you go home, work your way through that again.

And remember this wonderful story.

Go and sing again. Let's turn to look at this section that we read this morning in John chapter 18.

John chapter 18.

And we find Jesus has been taken, as we say, before the high priest and questioned. And we see again Peter's denial and such like.

[4 : 37] So just going to look at this section. And we've been following the arrest of Jesus and him being taken before the high priest. And we find that the interrogation begins because they begin to question Jesus from verse 19.

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. And Jesus is very clear. And he says, look, he said, everything that I have done has been above board.

Everything that I have said and taught has been done openly. I don't have any hidden agendas. I'm not out to work in secret.

My whole life, my whole ministry, my whole work has been in the open. So everything, you know everything about me.

So Jesus is quite clear on this. Now, the Jewish legal process was such that there had to be two witnesses totally agreed upon something.

[5 : 45] And it was actually a very, very serious thing. That was why the Lord put incredible emphasis upon any judicial process of telling the truth.

Because in the mouth of two witnesses, if two people witnessed against a person, that witness stood. And that was a terrible thing about if you had a false witness.

If two false witnesses came forward, they could cause the death of somebody. You have, for instance, that in the case of the time of Elijah. I remember when Ahab the king, his wife Jezebel, how she got two false witnesses to come forward and tell lies about Naboth.

And they took Naboth out and stoned him to death so that Ahab could get the vineyard. So the Lord put incredible emphasis upon telling the truth. There had to be truth.

And particularly any time there was any judicial process. So because the mouth of two witnesses, not one, they would never accept just the witness of one. But there had to be a minimum of two telling exactly the same thing.

[6 : 59] So Jesus says, look, he said, my whole ministry, my everything has been out in the open. I have done nothing in secret. And one of the officers, you can see there, was so incensed by the answer.

And that, you can see the frustration coming out. Because that's one of the things that comes through all the time. You can see they're so frustrated by Jesus because they can't break him. And so this officer hits him.

And Jesus asks the question, well, why have you hit me? That's what he says in verse 23.

If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong that I have done. But they couldn't. They couldn't get witnesses to bear wrong of what Jesus had done. And if I am telling the truth, why do you hit me?

So straight away they realize we're not going to get anywhere here. So that's why in verse 24 they sent him bound to Caiaphas the priest. Now it's at this point John moves the focus away from Jesus to Peter.

[8 : 09] And we find that Peter's denial continues. Now John doesn't give the same detail. We don't know exactly why.

But he doesn't go into the same detail about Peter's denial as some of the other gospel writers do. But the fact is that John also highlights it here.

And the denial of Peter, I suppose, is one of the saddest chapters, or one of the saddest episodes in the Bible. And it is something that would have left Peter distraught all his life.

I would imagine until the day that Peter died, he couldn't get over how he had denied his Lord and Savior. And he didn't just deny him by saying, I don't know anything about him.

We're told in one of the gospel writers that he invoked curses upon himself. So that when he was denying Jesus, he was actually cursing at the same time. He was swearing and cursing.

[9 : 09] He was showing his... You see, we'll look at that in a moment. Peter had aligned himself for a moment with the enemies of Jesus. And he was speaking like the enemies of Jesus.

And he had completely lost his way, obviously because of fear. And so he's saying that, I don't know the man. But we find that, of course, that one of the most testing questions came in verse 26. And this was the last of the denials. One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. Here's a man who had been in the garden, who had seen Peter, and had seen Peter cut off.

Must have been a cousin. Marcus must have been a cousin of this man. Did I not see you in the garden with him? Now this was a powerful question.

Because the garden, that was a loaded question. The garden meant so much to Jesus and to Peter. And they had often gone there. It tells us that it was a place that Jesus often went to.

[10:14] And Peter would have enjoyed so many precious times with Jesus in the garden. Times of intimacy, of fellowship.

I'm sure many a time Peter would be leaving the garden saying, Oh, wow, that was good. My heart feels full. It's wonderful being with Jesus. The garden was a special place to Jesus and to Peter. And here they're saying to Peter, Do not see you in the garden with Jesus? No, he says. He denied it.

Straight away. It's really quite extraordinary. But it just shows us how when somebody has kind of got into the wrong place, where anything is possible.

And we find that it is at that moment that the cock crowed, the rooster crowed. And of course, remember that Jesus, John doesn't elaborate in the way the other gospel writers do.

[11:17] But it's at that moment that Peter goes out, a broken man, because Jesus turned and looked at Peter. And as we know, sometimes a look conveys more than a thousand words.

And it was that look that just crumbled Peter. And he went out, and it tells us, He wept bitterly, went out into the night. So we have to ask ourselves, and we've hinted at this, and I think we've looked at it before, but just to refresh our mind, how did Peter arrive where he did?

Because it's all too possible for us. You might today, as a Christian, be saying, You know, I could never deny Jesus like that. And you feel within yourself that, yeah, you might say, My walk is not a perfect walk.

I know that. I'm not a perfect Christian. But I'm not liable to arrive where Peter... I can never envisage the situation where I will be with the sworn enemies of Jesus, denying Jesus, where I'll be swearing like the worst of them, and cursing, and just saying that Jesus means nothing to me.

I can never, ever, ever envisage myself being there. So how did Peter arrive there? Well, there was a sort of a downward spiral.

[12:35] And the first problem was that Peter had more confidence in his own courage, in his own conviction, than he actually had.

He thought he was stronger than he really was. And, you know, that's a danger for all of us.

Because when Peter heard the words of Jesus, when Jesus said that they were all going to forsake him, Peter put himself for him and said, No, I won't.

All others may forsake you, but I won't. And at that particular moment, he meant it. But he was giving himself far more credit than he ought.

Because Peter didn't realize just how weak he was. And, you know, there are times we can make boasts about ourselves. There are times we give ourselves more credit for whatever strength we may think we have.

But it's going very, very quickly we can find ourselves crumbling, just like Peter. And then, on top of that, Jesus had given Peter warnings.

[13:43] And he said, Hey, Peter, I'm going to tell you something. Satan has marked you out. Satan is desiring to get you. He didn't say that to the other disciples, but he said it to Peter.

Now, Peter should have heeded that warning. And on top of that, Jesus had said to Peter, James, and John, watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.

See, these were dark moments because the power of darkness was moving with an incredible sense of malice and evil at that time. But we find that every time when Jesus was praying in the garden, when he came back, Peter was sound asleep.

Yes, so was John, and so was James. And he would have to waken them up. And he says, watch and pray. Watch, be on guard. These are dark times. Satan's going about. Peter, he's going to get you.

But Peter couldn't keep awake. Back he goes to sleep. So you see that the Peter who thought he was stronger than he actually was is now a prayerless Peter.

[14:49] And this is becoming, it's becoming more and more dangerous all the time. And then we find, of course, that the situation arose in the garden where Peter, we saw that last week, Peter reacted in the way that Peter knew how he went to defend Jesus, planning to do exactly what he said.

Remember how he said to Jesus, look, he said, I'm prepared to die for you. I'll go to prison for you. I'll die with you. And he meant that, pulled out the sword to defend Jesus. And Jesus said, put away the sword.

And all of a sudden, Peter found he wasn't in control. And you know, at different levels in life, we like to be in control. Some people, some people are obsessive in their need to be in control of every situation.

There are other people, they don't need to feel that they've got to be in control. They kind of drift along and it's not a big deal if they're not in total control. But all of us, at one level or another, hate if our life is completely out of control.

If we don't know where we are, if we feel that we don't have any handle at all upon the reins of our life, what we feel our life is, and we say, I'm kind of, things are going out of control.

[16:00] I don't know what to do. Well, that's exactly where Peter was at that moment. He became all of a sudden incredibly vulnerable. And he didn't know where to turn or what to do.

And he was, as we say, his life was out of control. And he began then to follow Jesus, we're told, afar off. He hadn't stopped following Jesus, but when Jesus was taken away, Peter was way, way, way back.

John was with Peter all the time, with Jesus. John was following close, but Peter was way back. And again, we highlighted that the dangerous place of following far off.

I'll say this, better to follow Jesus far off than not to follow him at all. And maybe, I don't know where you are today, there might be some of you today who are Christians.

And sadly, you're following Jesus far off. It's not the way it used to be. I think we said this last week, where we can, we can be following Jesus, but it's just a little prayer, just very little Bible reading.

[17:11] The spark is gone. We're not as devoted or committed or consecrated as we once were. We know it. And so, we're following, but Jesus is far off.

That's a dangerous place because the further away we are from Jesus, the more we allow to crowd into our lives. and the less we are experiencing of his closeness, of his intimacy, of his love, of his fellowship, of his friendship.

See, there's a gap. But we're still in his care, he's still got a hold of us. Well, that's where Peter was following far off. And then we saw last week that he was warming himself.

See, in verse 18, the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire. These were the people who hated Jesus with a passion because it was cold and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them standing and warming himself.

Now, as we say, yes, we're part, we're part in the, we work in this world, we have friends within the world, we're such like. But I would say there's something wrong if you're making real friends of those who are, hate the Lord Jesus Christ.

[18:27] I know there's loads of people who are indifferent, there's loads of people who are uncommitted and such like. That's one thing. But it's another thing those who are bitterly opposed to Jesus, who hate Jesus with a passion.

That's strange if you're making close friends and hanging out with them all the time. Well, that's where Peter had arrived. Peter was warming himself and he was aligning himself.

John wasn't there. John was in the same place. It was John who had got Jesus into this place where they were trying Jesus. Is Peter standing with John?

No. There he is with the enemies of Jesus because he doesn't want to identify himself with John. He doesn't want to identify himself with Jesus. He's identifying himself right at this moment with the enemies of Jesus.

He's really saying, I'm one with you guys. I'm not over there with him. So you can see how far Peter has fallen. And as Peter, of course, as we said, stands as a warning to all of us because we've got to remember that this man, we're talking here of one of the key leaders in the church in the history of the gospel.

[19:42] If you were to go through the history of church history and pick out the key leaders that have ever been in the history of the church, you would take out people, obviously, like the Apostle Paul.

But Peter would be right up there at the very forefront. And yet, here he is. So he stands as a warning to us. But he also, as we move on, we will see the mercy of Jesus.

We also see the wonder, the power, the renewal of Jesus of bringing Peter back and not only bringing him back but bringing him to a place of greater usefulness than ever again.

That's a wonderful thing about the Christian faith. There is never ultimate defeat. There might be defeat, there might be falls, we might get bruised and battered, we'll hold our hands up and say, oh

Lord, I've done so many things that are wrong.

But you know, the Lord never says, ah, that's it, you're finished, I'm finished with you. That's one of the great things, is that the Christian road is a place of new beginnings, new opportunities.

[20 : 48] And the Lord shows us that over and over again, and Peter is a prime example of that. But now we come to, in the next section where we find that Jesus is brought before Pilate.

And just looking at this very briefly, I think we meet one of the most extraordinary moments of hypocrisy that you will ever find anywhere. Because, see verse 28, then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters.

It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters. Why? Because he was a Gentile, so that they would not be defiled, but that they could eat the Passover.

This is self-righteousness at its very worst. Here are these men, and they won't enter Pilate's palace, in case by stepping over the door, they become unclean.

They get defiled by a non-Jew. And then they couldn't take the Passover. That's the way they're thinking. They're so caught up with the externals.

[21 : 57] Got to be seen to be right. And at the same time, in their hand and in their heart, is murder against the Son of God. So on the one hand, they're saying to God, look at how good we are.

we have not put one foot over the threshold of that Gentile. And at the same time, they're planning to murder God's Son.

And that is hypocrisy at its ultimate. And yet, you know, sometimes when we strip things away, and when we begin to look at our own life, sometimes we're too caught up with the externals.

Our heart can be skewed with, and we can actually be saying to the Lord, Lord, wasn't I good there? The Lord is the one who searches the heart. We've always got to remember that.

Get the heart. That's the first and foremost. Get ourselves right inside. Get ourselves right before God. That's the most important thing of all. Once that's right, then the rest will be looked after.

[22 : 59] And that's what was wrong with these people all the time. Jesus said they were like painted sepulchers on another occasion. And so, we find that they wouldn't go in.

And it's quite amazing that Pilate accommodated their behavior. Pilate, of course, was a politician. And it's quite amazing really when you think about it.

That's what we find in verse 29. So, Pilate went outside to them and said, what accusation do you bring against this man? And you find when we go into chapter 19, that Pilate goes back and forth. he goes in to interrogate Jesus. Then he goes back out to the crowd. He gets the response of the crowd. Then he goes back in to interrogate and speak to Jesus.

So, he's back and forth like a yo-yo. Because the Jews wouldn't come in to where Pilate was. But, you know, the amazing thing when we find this is that as Pilate begins to examine Jesus, and as it goes through into chapter 19, we find that Pilate very quickly comes to the conclusion.

[24 : 08] Not only is this man not worthy of death, but he makes quite an extraordinary statement. He says, I find no fault in this man. I doubt that Pilate ever said that of anybody else.

He couldn't find any fault within Jesus. Now, of course, when Pilate begins the interrogation of Jesus, and he's asking Jesus, right, who are you? Are you a king?

Jesus tells negatively, first of all, he says, my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom was of this world, then those who followed would be fighting you.

It would be war. But that's not, my kingdom is not of this world. But that doesn't mean that Jesus has no interest in setting up a kingdom in this world.

He has. That's what he's doing right now. He is setting up, he's establishing the kingdom of God. Now, we tend to think of a kingdom in a particular location.

[25 : 07] We live in the United Kingdom. We can go to a map and point to it. But the kingdom of God is different. It is wherever God's people are. So, dotted right throughout this world, in all the different continents, and on the oceans as people are on ships, there and in the plains in the sky, there is where the kingdom of God is.

Every individual believer, Jesus on another occasion said, the kingdom of God is within you. And so, the kingdom of God is different with regard to its glory, to its regard to its rule, with regard to its strategy, with regard to its warfare.

All these things are different to human kingdoms. And Jesus is saying, that's to Pilate, that's what my kingdom is. And as Jesus and Pilate talk, Pilate, of course, Jesus highlights of how he is truth.

He's highlighting this whole area of truth. You say that I am a king. For this purpose, Jesus says, I was born, and for this purpose, I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. this is vital for us to understand and grasp. We live in a world that craves truth.

[26 : 34] There's a lot of people who, I suppose, like Pilate, are asking, what is truth? We're coming to an election, and I'm not going to go down any political road, don't worry.

But the one thing we're always saying is, the one thing we're hearing all the time, it doesn't matter who or what politician, we hear so much about the word about spin. They've got to put a slant, they're always looking to get mileage out of anything.

It's loads of twists and turns, and often you're listening and think, wow, that's good. Then you say to yourself, I wonder if that's real. You're often asking this question, is this true?

Or is it? Jesus only speaks the truth. Everything about him is true. true. And I think this is one of the things, if we could drive home anything to people today, is please come, pick up the Gospels, and begin to read this, because this man is truth, the God man.

He alone is absolute truth. Jesus made that extraordinary statement where he said, I am the truth, truth personified. And in this world where everything is mixed up and we don't know who to believe or what we can trust, shining through it all, walking this path through it all, is Jesus.

[28 : 02] His word is absolute truth. And I would say to anybody today who maybe hasn't grasped that, please read the Gospel. Read the Gospel.

Read Jesus' statements. Read what he is saying. Ask the Lord to open your heart to understand this, because it will change your life to have truth within you, to have one that you can totally believe in and trust in and commit your life.

You're all to. He is truth. And Pilate asks Jesus a question. What is truth? And notice what Pilate does.

We're going to finish here. Notice what Pilate does. after Jesus had said that to him, verse 38, Pilate said to him, what is truth? After he said this, he went back outside to the Jews.

Do you notice what Pilate does? Pilate throws out this statement, this question. What is truth? And he's asking truth personified, that question.

[29 : 09] But notice what Pilate does. He doesn't wait for the answer. He just turns in his heel and walks out. What is truth? And he walks away. And he never got the answer.

Standing in the presence of absolute truth, and he didn't wait for the answer. And you know, so many people are doing the same thing. People are, when people come to church, they're in the presence of truth, and yet they turn away.

So many people will not open their Bibles to come to experience and see for themselves the one who is truth. So many people just walk away from the one who is truth.

Well, I hope today that nobody here will, because Jesus is speaking to us in his word, the one who says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we pray that this truth that is the word may go deep within our own hearts, that we might be molded by it and shaped by it, and that we may come to know you more and more in it and through it.

[30 : 21] We give thanks, oh, Lord, for all that the whole way of salvation has been to us and for us. We give thanks that today we're able to celebrate that our Saviour, Jesus Christ, is our risen Saviour, Lord, who is on the throne in glory, and who is head of his church.

Lord, bless us, we pray. Bless the cup of tea that follows in the hall and take away from us our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.