

Sunday Morning - Communion Service

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[0 : 00] I would be obliged if you would have your Bibles open at John chapter 19. And I think it's a fair thing for me to say that there is nothing that can quite compare to an eyewitness account of a great event.

For example, we can read about the battles of the Second World War in history books, but to listen to an old soldier describing the deafening sound of the gunfire or the sight of a once thriving town reduced to rubble, the stench of the dead scattered like litter.

And once you're there, you're right there with them, you're right there. Eyewitnesses bring a scene to life. You can watch the replay of the cup final on the television with a detailed analysis of every kick of the ball, but only someone who is there can communicate the atmosphere of the game, the excitement, the joy of victory, or the despair of defeat.

Now, it's true that an eyewitness doesn't see or hear everything. Sometimes their vision is restricted, and they might not hear quite accurately everything that is being said.

Yet, as human beings, we still prefer the testimony of another human being, which is why eyewitnesses still play such an important role in court cases.

[1 : 38] Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified publicly. It was a public execution. So there were plenty of eyewitnesses.

And among them was the anonymous disciple referred to in this fourth gospel as the disciple whom Jesus loved, whom we presume for very good reasons was the disciple John himself.

This is a disciple who was reclining next to Jesus at the Last Supper. This is a disciple whose connections gained him and Peter entry into the high priest's courtyard while Jesus was being interrogated.

And this is a disciple who was present at our Lord's death, standing alongside Mary, our Lord's mother, and three other women, to whom our Lord Jesus so movingly entrusts his mother's future welfare.

And this is a disciple who solemnly declares at verse 35, look at it with me, he who saw it has borne witness, his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth that you also may believe.

[3 : 16] This is why John wrote his gospel, that you also may believe. He specifically says in chapter 20, verse 31, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Today, I want us to try and see what John saw. What did John see on that first Good Friday?

Now, at one level, John saw what everybody else saw. Just like the crowds lining the Via Della Rosa, he saw Jesus battered and bruised, flogged within an inch of his life, carrying his cross up the hill to Golgotha.

Just like the chief priests and those who came to mock and jeer, John saw Jesus crucified with the two criminals. He heard their pleas, he heard their screams, he heard their curses.

He witnessed the soldiers gambling for Jesus' clothes. He heard our Lord's last words. It is finished. Like the soldier who stabbed Jesus' side just to make sure that he was dead, John saw the blood and what looked like water pour from his lifeless body.

[4 : 54] John saw and heard all these things. John saw more. John saw more.

And what he saw caused him to believe. To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

What he saw convinced him that Jesus really was who he said he was. And what he saw made him want to share with us, with you here today, that you also may believe.

Let's look carefully at what John saw. Looking not merely with our reader's eye, but as believers, with the eye of faith.

Now, Pilate, the Roman governor, having made strenuous efforts to release Jesus, finally and resentfully submits to the pressure that he was under.

[6 : 01] The chief priests produced their winning hand. You'll see it in verse 12 of chapter 19. If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.

More than the threat of crowd trouble, Pilate fears a report winging its way to Rome. Alleging that he had allowed a pretender to the throne to live, no matter how ridiculous the claim.

Verse 16, finally, Pilate handed him, Jesus, over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. So they took Jesus.

That's what everyone else would have seen. The soldiers are in charge of Jesus. They press the cross beam upon his back for him to carry through the streets.

When he arrives at the place of execution, they force him onto the upright beam, stretching his arms out, nailing his wrists to the cross. No question whatsoever as to who is in charge here.

[7 : 10] But John sees things differently. his account of the crucifixion is peppered with phrases like verse 24, this happened that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

Verse 28, so that the scriptures would be fulfilled. Jesus said, verse 36, these things happened so that the scriptures would be fulfilled. Who really is in charge here? Who really is in charge of Jesus? Now, our Lord himself repeatedly spoke about his time or his hour not having yet come until we reach John chapter 12 verse 23 where he then says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

And also in chapter 13 verse 1 before he washes the disciples' feet we are told Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

My friends, everything about the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was precisely according to the Father's plan. Scripture had foretold how it would be.

[8 : 29] The very fact that he is crucified bears that out because under Jewish law stoning was the preferred method of execution. Crucifixion was our Roman practice.

But Isaiah had predicted that the Messiah would be pierced for our transgressions. And Zechariah with the prophet's voice had declared they will look on me the one they have pierced and grieved bitterly as one mourns for an only child.

It's no coincidence that Christ Jesus was crucified on the eve of the Passover feast. That great celebration of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

Way back at the beginning of the gospel you remember how John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus and had said look behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

John the eyewitness sees it now on the night when God would judge Egypt the Passover Lamb's blood was smeared on the doorposts of the houses to indicate that there had already been a death in that house and therefore judgment would pass over that family.

[10 : 07] Isn't it just interesting that the brush that they used to smear the blood and the lintels was a sprig of hyssop the very plant used to cradle the sponge soaked in wine vinegar that was put to Jesus' parched lips.

And even more interesting is that since the Passover Lamb was to be eaten in haste it was not to be carved up neatly like a Sunday roast.

None of the bones of the Lamb were to be broken. Now those oh so pious priests they didn't want such a high and holy day as the Passover Sabbath being desecrated with the bodies of dead criminals hanging on their crosses so they requested that their death be hastened by smashing the legs with a hammer.

Now you may know this that crucifixion really killed a man by asphyxiation. Hanging as he did prevented breathing unless he could push himself up against the cross for a breath.

by smashing their legs they could no longer lift themselves up for a breath. Look at verse 33 here. What does verse 33 tell us?

[11 : 33] But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead they did not break his legs. And what does Paul say to the Corinthians?

for Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Sacrificed so that by faith in him God's judgment may pass over us.

What else did John see? He noticed the sign that Pilate had prepared to be fastened to Jesus cross.

Now this was a common practice stating the crime committed by the criminal but Pilate was doing more than that. This was his revenge.

This was the revenge of a man forced to do something he didn't want to do. This was winning the eye to those chief priests and their troublesome fanatical little people. Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews.

[12:44] Now shortly before Pilate had asked them shall I crucify your king? We have no king but Caesar they replied. We'll never were protestations of loyalty so phony so false and Pilate knows it.

He knew that his placard would rile them. Right that he claimed to be the king of the Jews they demanded but this time the governor was not for turning.

The Jews would have muttered while the Romans would have smirked but John John would have remembered that only a week before the Jerusalem crowds had been singing Hosanna blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord blessed is the king of Israel.

They were echoing Zechariah's words do not be afraid O daughter of Zion see your king is coming seated on a donkey's coat.

Indeed I wonder if you remember that the first time that Peter and the rest of them had met Jesus it was Nathaniel the cynic who having revised his opinion of Jesus said it's in John 1 and 49 Rabbi you are the son of God you are the king of Israel.

[14:16] Well now look at him. Never was a king less kingly. Charles II hid from Cromwell's men hiding up an oak tree.

Bonnie Prince Charlie dressed in women's clothing to escape the Hanoverians. All very humiliating. But a crucified king reigning from a cross preposterous outrageous yet our Lord himself spoke about being lifted up just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert.

So the son of man must be lifted up that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. But I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.

And after Jesus said that John makes this comment he said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. Lifted up like a king upon a throne only his throne is a cross.

nevertheless he is lifted up and there on the cross he is winning eternal life for sinners.

[15:46] Let me change the metaphor. The cross is his director's chair. Jesus is in control.

Jesus is in control. Satan the eternal traitor. he tried to steal our Lord's birthright by promising him power. If only he would bow down and worship him.

Jesus sent him packing then. But Satan like a ravenous wolf kept coming back to torment him trying to deflect him from the father's will. But on the cross Jesus routs Satan once and for all.

His days are numbered. Lord. The cross is our Christ's judgment throne and there Satan is condemned. Oh he strikes at our Lord's heel but Jesus crushes the serpent's heel and Satan's plan to ruin God's good creation is forever undone.

His scheme to rob God of the glory of a redeemed people is on the cross thwarted. His days are numbered. Death is well my friends.

[16:57] Death is well. Death like a foreign army has invaded God's good world bringing us grief and sorrow. The human race has never welcomed death.

The human race has never got used to death. We have always resented the presence of death.

We've never been able to do anything about it though. But on the cross my friends Christ the king procures eternal life for his people and never again will death have the last word.

Never again. So though Pilate contemptuously names Jesus king of the Jews he speaks better than he knows.

And interesting as well that the placard is written in three languages in Aramaic and Latin and Greek giving it universal application.

Aramaic was the local language spoken throughout the Middle East. Latin of course was the language of Rome the language of law and power. Greek well Greek in those days was as widespread as English is nowadays.

[18:13] What did the psalmist say? Say among the nations the Lord reigns. And how I love that passage in Isaiah 49 verse 6.

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

It's too small a thing. I will also make you a light to the Gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Jesus the king. John is also close enough to the cross to hear Jesus speak.

What does he hear? He hears the one who offered the Samaritan woman water living water. He hears this one say I am thirsty.

[19 : 14] He hears Jesus who once declared he who believes in me will never be thirsty. He hears him say I thirst. Okay so do the others.

They hear that too and they dab his lips with a sponge soaked in some cheap wine vinegar. But again John hears more.

He hears in our Lord's thirst a fulfillment of scripture. Psalm 22 verse 15 perhaps. My strength is dried up like a pot's herd and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

Or Psalm 69 verse 21 they put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. I think of that story that parable told by our Lord of the rich man who ignored the plight of the poor man on his doorstep. Jesus says that they both died. Lazarus the beggar is conveyed to heaven to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man however finds himself in hell and as he looks up towards Abraham he calls out father Abraham have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue for I am in agony in this fire.

[20 : 37] Friends it seems to me that our Lord's thirst was not merely physical he was enduring the agony of hell the wrath of God for the sin that he was bearing for his people he was drinking to the fool the cup of suffering proffered him by his father.

Dear friends dear believing friends Jesus Christ said I thirst that you need never say I thirst and then when having drunk our Lord whispers it is finished and John adds that with that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit and all those within years short would have no doubt regarded these words as a recognition that he was about to die but by faith dear friends by faith we discover that more is finished than just our Lord's life the work that he came to do is finished he had come as the good shepherd to lay down his life for the sheep he had come to give his life as a ransom for many so our

Lord's mission did not end in failure it ended in success he came and did what he came to do it was mission accomplished for Jesus mission accomplished as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world Jesus put an end to all the ceremonies and sacrifices required by the Old Testament law God's ancient people had to observe certain rituals and offer certain sacrifices to procure forgiveness over and over again a sin at a time you might say but how does the author to the Hebrews put it day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties again and again he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins but when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God and of course we know that you only sit down when you finish your job he sat down the job was finished and finally and most dramatically

John sees he sees that sudden flow of blood and water from Jesus side having decided not to crush our Lord's legs with a mallet one conscientious soldier stabs him with a spear now the Greek word there just means to stab or to prick it needn't have made a large wound it was just enough to get a reaction if he was alive but there's no reaction Jesus is indeed dead now medical experts argue over what exactly caused the water and the blood to come splurting out from what I read it seems to be that certain fluids build up within the chest of a person who has died violently but without any external wounds but what is not in dispute is that this is what happens if you pierce a corpse the corpse of someone recently dead in a certain place and this flow of blood and water causes John to think of

Zechariah let's just turn to that for a moment before we finish to Zechariah chapter 12 look at this Zechariah chapter 12 page 965 listen to Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10 this is this is what John is thinking about when he sees that flow of blood and water Zechariah 12 and 10 and I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy so that when they look on me on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weeps bitterly over him as one weeps over a firstborn now

[25 : 19] Zechariah is describing a time of revival a time when God's people will come to their senses and will realize how they have broken the Lord's heart with their sin he says they will mourn they will mourn with the anguish of a mother and father who have had to bury the apple of their eye their only child they will sob with tears that seem to come from some deep underground stream from within their hearts which once turned on cannot be turned off they will wail as the Egyptians wailed when they found their firstborn stone cold dead they will look on the God they have pierced

the God whose love they have spurned the God whose overtures they have rejected and they will grieve says Zechariah they will mourn now isn't this exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost the crowd having heard Peter preach they're alarmed by what they hear when the people heard this they were cut to the heart and they said to

Peter and the other apostles brothers what shall we do is there any hope is there any hope Zechariah continues look at chapter 13 verse 1 on that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness the God who opens his people's eyes to their sin to the gravity of their sin is also the God who will wipe away their tears who will cleanse them from their sin who will cleanse them from the callousness that led to this grief in the first place and this is what John sees this is what John sees all through the gospel all through his gospel water symbolizes new life

Jesus says to Nicodemus I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit to the pilgrims on the feast of tabernacles Jesus proclaims whoever believes in me as the scripture has said streams of living water will flow from within him this water this water of eternal life is ours ours because our Lord Jesus shed his blood water the agent of external washing teaches us what only the blood of Jesus can do only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from our sins here's one of the old redemption hymns we used to sing in my youth Jesus keep me near the cross there a precious fountain free to all a healing stream flows from

Calvary's mountain in the cross in the cross be my glory ever till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river Jesus keep me near the cross John says these things happened so that the scriptures would be fulfilled the soldiers they just saw another criminal the chief priest what did they see they saw a meddling troublemaker removed from the scene oh but John John saw so much more so much more and what about you today as we approach the Lord's table what about you what do you see what do you see these elements of bread and wine my friends are given to us that we might see better by faith do you see the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world taking away your sin by faith do you see the good shepherd laying down his life for his sheep laying down his life for you by faith do you see the bread of life giving his flesh for the life of the world for your life do you see what

John saw do you see with faith let's pray together open our eyes dear Lord open our eyes bread wine tangible elements but by faith dear Lord by faith we want to see Jesus we want to see our saviour we want to see him and know him Lord God grant to each and every one of us the faith to see and to hear to believe to believe Lord in Christ Jesus holy name we ask this Amen