

The Cross in HD (Communion Service)

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- [0 : 0 0] Our modern technology has given us the ability to see more than we have ever seen in the past.
- For instance, we are able to see more of the universe than anyone has able to see in the past. It is really quite incredible how much of the universe can be seen by way of instruments and technology and utilizing all kinds of humankind's ability in science.
- We know more today about stars and galaxies and we know more about how vast the universe is than ever before.
- And then we can see on the other side of the spectrum we are able to see smaller than we have ever seen before. They have these days what they call scanning electron microscopes that are able even now, I believe, to see the atomic structure of something.
- And they're able even to try and ask what does an atom contain? And they know much more now about what an atom contains and what it's made up of.
- [1 : 2 6] It's absolutely breathtaking. It's breathtaking to look out and it's breathtaking to look in. But we can also see much more detail now.
- More detail than we have ever seen before. I'm sure many of us have got high definition televisions. High definition is absolutely amazing, isn't it?
- You can see things that you never ever saw in an ordinary photograph. I recently attended in the summertime when I was on holiday, I attended a special demonstration given by the BBC in Glasgow about their new super high definition technology.
- And it was truly incredible. You sat there and you watched a big screen of the Olympics. And not only did you see those who were taking part in the Olympics, but you could see every single person in the crowd and you could identify every single person.
- Everyone's face was identifiable. And I'm sure many of us have marveled at. I'm a particular fan of some of these tremendous natural programs where animals are seen close up.
- [2 : 4 7] Never before would you ever have been able to see a tiger and the whiskers of a tiger and the eye of a tiger. Maybe a dead one, yeah. But not a live one.
- It's truly glorious. And of course, all of these things, they can be used or abused. But nevertheless, we're amazed at what can be done with modern technology.
- Well, here is Paul and he's talking about high definition. He's talking about the cross in high definition because that's what the gospel is.
- The message of the gospel is the cross in high definition. Let's read it again. Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus was publicly portrayed, detailed, demonstrated as crucified.
- The cross in high definition. And that's what I'd like to talk about today because that's why we're here, to remember the cross. And we grow in our understanding the more we discover about what it meant for Jesus to die on the cross, what took place on the cross.

[4 : 11] We, first of all, are reminded of what took place physically. If we had been there, we would have seen the awful specter of a man being nailed to a Roman cross.

Someone said once that if you were crucified, you died a thousand deaths. Whoever was responsible for inventing crucifixion as a means of putting someone to death must have been an incredibly cruel man.

And yet it took place continuously, regularly, in the cities and towns in the Roman Empire.

I guess that they would be making an example of criminals to deter others, to scare them off from breaking the law, from rising up against the Roman government.

But yet this time, there seemed to be a difference. There seemed to be several differences. For one thing, not only was this man nailed to a cross, but this man, there was a particular atmosphere of intense hatred within the crowd.

[5 : 27] There was a euphoria that was quite unprecedented. And this goes back to when they arrested the man Jesus of Nazareth.

And when they took him hurriedly to the Jewish ruling council. And when they condemned him and handed him over to Pilate. And Pilate, of course, you remember, was put through this confusion of what he should do.

Whether he should release Barabbas or whether he should release Jesus. But there was such an intensity amongst those who were determined to put him to death.

That Pilate was pressurized into choosing to release Barabbas instead of Jesus. Something that seemed to go against every voice in his head.

Every voice of justice that knew that Barabbas was guilty and Jesus was innocent. And yet, it shows you how pressure can be put. Political pressure and mob pressure can be so effective at times.

[6 : 28] The power of public opinion. The public opinion that had one time been so for Jesus. It had supported and followed him. No man ever spoke like this, they said.

The crowds waited for him coming into Jerusalem. And they placed palm branches in front of him. They went to hear him. And 5,000 people on the lakes, the shores of the Lake of Galilee.

Going to hear him and listening to him. Staying for days. 5,000 people. And yet now, they're standing. Or rather, many of them are standing in front of Pilate.

And they're demanding his blood. They're demanding his death. No room for a fair trial here. They hate him. They absolutely loathe him.

There's a peculiar evil to their loathing this man. What was it about this man that deserved such animosity and enmity and hatred?

[7 : 29] Well, there again, there lies an incredible mystery. Because everything about his life in Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, they only talk about the good that Jesus did.

From the very beginning, when he started teaching and healing and explaining the kingdom of God to all those who would listen to him. He never did anything but good.

He went to people who were lame and blind and deaf and even dead. And raised them up again. He always had time for people.

And yet, here he is now, bound. And he is condemned as someone who's guilty in front of Pilate. And there doesn't seem to have been any reason, apart from religious prejudice, coming from the Jewish rulers at that time.

It was truly remarkable. So, that's what we would have seen if we were there. We would have seen the crowd. We would have been amongst the crowd. And I guess you and I would have felt distinctly uncomfortable being in such an atmosphere of darkness and hatred.

- [8 : 42] But there was far more than that. There was his reaction to his being put to death. Normally, if someone was given an unfair trial, you would expect him to take every legal recourse to try and prove himself innocent.
- But not Jesus. He was silent. He seemed to give himself over to his accusers. Hand himself to surrender willingly into the hands of those who hated him so much.
- And then when they nailed him, they continued the mocking and the deriding and the comments and the sniggers and the laughs.
- And because they thought that they had the upper hand. I guess that if you're part of a crowd who is successful in condemning a man to death and when he is bound to a cross, then you do feel that you have some kind of authority and that you're the person who is able to wander around and he's not.
- He's dying. I guess that they felt that perverted authority in being able to watch while he suffered the agony.
- [9 : 54] Of course, as everyone else suffered who was crucified. There was a sense, a physical sense in which Jesus suffered the same agony as the thieves that were with him.
- In a physical sense, in a bodily sense. Even although we know that the agony he suffered went much further than that. We'll come on to that in a few moments.
- There were seven things that Jesus said on the cross.
- And these were the last things that you were, the last statements that you would ever expect to hear from someone who was condemned wrongly.
- He prayed for those who were crucifying him. He said, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do. He made provision for his mother who would now be left alone.
- [11 : 00] And made sure that someone else, John the disciple, was going to take care of her. But his statements were increasingly mysterious. He spoke to God, clearly praying to God.
- But he spoke to him as his own father. This was something he had done. And indeed, part of what he had been accused of. Calling God his father and making himself equal with God.
- The Jews were outraged when they heard that. And yet he never stopped. There was no admission that he was wrong. Because he wasn't wrong. God was his father.
- He was the son of God himself. And he insisted on this unique relationship with God to the very end.
- And these seven statements that Jesus made are loaded with information as to why he died on the cross.
- [12 : 06] And indeed, why he had to die on the cross. So, the first element in our high definition picture of the cross is what you see and hear on the outside.
- But the Bible gives us more information than that. It allows us to enter into the mind of Jesus as he hung and he suffered on the cross.
- And it's by entering into the mind of Jesus that we begin to understand that the cross was not simply a tragic miscarriage of justice.
- But that it was the very plan and purpose of God himself. Every single detail in all its high definition was ordered and planned by God to take place at exactly the right moment.
- Because this was God's way of saving people from their sins and redeeming them and bringing them back to himself.
- [13 : 18] This was the only way in which our souls could be saved and in which our sins could be forgiven. If we're going to go into the mind of Jesus, we have to go back to the Old Testament.

And we go back to the Psalms. In Psalm 22 that we very often sing at communion time, deliberately so. Because whatever experience the psalmist was going through originally, he was being guided by God to see into the future.

And to foreshadow what Jesus would experience and suffer. The loneliness and the pain and the isolation and the hatred that Jesus suffered. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning? Oh, my God, I cry by day. But you do not answer. And by night, and I find no rest.

You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted. They trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried and were rescued. In you they trusted and were put to shame.

[14 : 28] But I, but I am a worm and not a man. Scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me.

They wag their heads. And they say, he trusts in the Lord. Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him. For he delights in him. Now, not only is this a truly remarkable, detailed account of actually what happened when Jesus was crucified.

But it allows us to appreciate something of the devastation that Jesus felt in himself. The genuine devastation that Jesus felt.

The suffering. Of course, we will never understand that fully. We can never. I don't, I'm sure I don't even need to say that. And yet these words give us something of Jesus' experience.

So that we're able to understand that Jesus, what Jesus went through. The separation that took place.

[15 : 34] Between himself and the father. For us, he alone suffered for our sins. So that's the thoughts of Jesus in high definition.

But then we go further than that. And we have to ask, what lay behind the cross? If we're going to insist, as we've done, that the cross was necessary for our salvation.

And it was. It wasn't an option for God amongst three or four different options. This was the only way in which our sin could be removed.

There was no other way that God could take. Otherwise, he would have taken it. There was the necessity of the death of Jesus.

And it's important for us to know that and to be assured of that. There simply was no other way of our salvation than in God himself becoming sin for us.

[16 : 37] And that's what we want to explore in the latter part of this service. Because that's what the cross, that was the purpose of the cross.

Paul puts it this way. He who knew no sin, Jesus, was made to be sin for us. That we might become the righteousness of God in him.

And once again, in order to fully understand as far as we're able to, we have to go back into the Old Testament and to the way in which the events of the cross were foretold by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 53, where he says, He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not. But then Isaiah goes on to explain what transaction took place and why it was that this man, this suffering servant, suffered in the way that he did.

He says, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

[18 : 02] But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

And with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And what that tells us, and as it's unfolded in the New Testament, is that Jesus, in giving his life on the cross, did so as a sacrifice.

That's what John meant when he said, Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. The Lamb in the Old Testament was the sacrificial Lamb. The Lamb that was put to death at Passover.

The animal that was put to death at the burnt offering and the sin offering and the fellowship offering. There was no end to the shedding of blood in the Old Testament. And all of that looked forward to and pointed to the day in which Jesus would be himself, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

[19 : 16] Now what happened in an Old Testament sacrifice was that the guilt of the person's sin was laid upon the Lamb. And when the person put his hands on the animal's head, the guilt of the person was transferred.

It traveled, if you like, in the eyes of God onto the animal. And the animal was put to death instead of the person himself. That was the whole point of animal sacrifice in the Old Testament.

There simply was no other way of being right with God, being reconciled to God. But like I said, every sacrifice in the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Jesus and to the death of Jesus, when he would be the Lamb of God and when he in himself would take upon himself the guilt of our sin.

Now here's what to me is truly breathtaking and defies all our understanding. It's that the entirety of your guilt and my guilt, past, present and future.

I can't think beyond my own guilt. Can you think beyond your guilt?

[20 : 49] The stuff that you've done in your life? Your failures? Your thoughts? Your attitudes?

Your attitudes? Not to mention the fact that just we're guilty of original sin. Can you imagine even in this church today, the entirety of our guilt being placed upon one man?

And then when you go outside of here, you think of all the thousands and millions of Christians in the world today, and every Christian that has ever lived, the entirety of our guilt, all the shame, and the horror, and the deceit, and the pride, and the anger, and the rebelliousness, and the conceit, and the covetousness, and the godlessness, and the paganism, that we were all guilty of.

And it's placed upon Jesus. He became guilty, and the wrath of God was unleashed upon him.

No, I don't understand that. But it had to be the Son of God, because no one else was qualified to take that guilt upon himself.

[22 : 34] And when God decreed to save you and I from our sins, he did it personally. He took it upon himself.

It wasn't something he delegated to an angel. And there was no way he could elevate an ordinary human being to a place of sinlessness, because there was no ordinary human being that could be elevated to a place of sinlessness.

So it had to be God himself coming into our world and becoming one of us in order to represent us like the high priest we were talking about last night.

He had to be a human being. Jesus had to be a human being in order to represent us before God and to pay the enormous, unthinkable, indescribable price for our sin.

It really is quite astonishing. That's why Paul calls it his indescribable gift, his unthinkable gift. Can you imagine the darkness, the awfulness, we can only imagine it, of one person becoming guilty for our sin.

[23 : 50] And yet, that is what the gospel is. God, in the flesh, being made guilty for our sin. Isaiah 53 goes on to say something quite remarkable, that it was the will of the Lord to crush him.

Even in that, these moments of separation where God, the Father, has to turn away in wrath when he views his own son as being the entirety of our sin in the flesh, when he is guilty of that sin.

And when God places upon him his wrath, and yet, it says, it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief.

When his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring and he shall prolong his days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. See, this was the passage Isaiah 53 that the, remember in Acts chapter 8 when the Ethiopian eunuch, when Philip was commanded to go to the Ethiopian eunuch and he was in his chariot all alone and he was trying to make sense of this passage.

And he couldn't make sense because there wasn't enough information about the passage. The passage itself doesn't give us enough information. It has to be explained. And Philip was sent to the eunuch, he was reading this passage, and he just simply explained it to him in high definition.

[25 : 26] Once he did that, there was a peculiar power in the gospel that drew him, just like it drew the Galatian people when they heard the gospel explained to them the cross in high definition.

What was it? The details, the mockings, the pain, the agony, the mind of Jesus, the person of Jesus, who he was, what he came to do, and the reason, what exactly took place between him and the Father in Jesus becoming the sacrifice for our sin and in willingly going and suffering what we deserve.

And as a result of that suffering, God accepts all those who come to faith in Jesus as his own, his own people, his own righteous people.

Do you think of yourself as righteous today? It's hard, isn't it, when you look at your own life and you're aware of your own weaknesses and failures.

It's one thing to say, yes, I can maybe bring myself to believe that I'm forgiven, but surely not righteous. But that's what God says we are.

[26 : 52] The New Testament says that if you believe in the Lord Jesus, your sins have been wiped away, washed, cleansed. Maybe you say, well, that's enough for me.

But it's not enough for God. God goes one step further and he says, you are the righteousness of Christ. That's your standing and your status in my eyes.

That's what it means to be justified. You and I are not only cleansed, not only washed, but that we are clothed with the very righteousness of Jesus Christ.

We've only scratched the surface. That's all we can do at a service like this when we're remembering the death of Jesus. All we can do is produce some thoughts that are associated with his death in the hope that they focus our minds on what we do this morning.

The more definition we can give to the gospel, and we're not giving it from ourselves, we're extracting it from the rest of the Bible, the more enriched we are. Doesn't it give rise to joy in our hearts today, when we know, when we're reminded afresh of what God did for us and giving himself for us.

[28 : 16] The love for you and I, the extraordinary love that took him there, and that led him to take one step after another until that moment when his work was finished, and our soul was saved and secure forever in Jesus Christ.

And when God talks about security, he's not talking about the security we have at the moment, but the security that is guaranteed for the future. We're going to bow our heads in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we give thanks today for the information that you've given us, living, the living details of the cross.

And we ask, O Lord, that as we are reminded of them, that we might be aroused in our own souls to come to the table, to remember with thankfulness and with joy what you have done for us.

In Jesus' name, Amen.