

Matthew 27:15-54

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Date: 14 April 2017

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[0 : 00] Please join me in prayer. Lord, what a remarkable account this is. Lord, we pray tonight that as we meditate upon it for a few minutes, Lord, that you would help us.

We pray that you would help us to understand the depth of your love for us, the greatness of what we are reading about in this account.

God, we pray that you would help us to see clearly as the centurion did, the significance of all that we think about today, this Good Friday, as we remember Jesus dying on the cross.

Lord, I ask for your help tonight. You would help me to speak your words. And for all of us, that we would hear your voice speaking to us. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. It's not fair. All right, all you kids out there, I see you. How many of you have said that in the last week?

[1 : 16] Hands up. It's not fair. All right, adults, you don't have to raise your hand. It's not fair. One of the most common things, it springs from our human hearts, isn't it?

It's not fair when my brother gets more ice cream than I do. It's not fair that he's six foot and I'm five foot and we're playing basketball. It's not fair when the referee misses the call and the other team wins.

It's not fair. It's not fair in all sorts of trivial, little, everyday parts of our lives. But it's not fair in a much more profound way too.

It's not fair when cancer and heart disease steal life from a healthy loved one. It's not fair when we're mistreated because of the color of our skin, our gender.

It's not fair when children are killed by chemical weapons. It's not fair. It's not just an everyday experience of our human condition, but it is a very profound reality of our world that the world we live in is not fair.

[2 : 34] And we do wonder where is God? And does he care? And what will he do about it? Well, friends, this is what Good Friday is all about.

What he did do about it is Good Friday. As you have heard, as we've read through the account in the Gospel of Matthew, of the last day of Jesus' life and him going to the cross and being crucified there, we see what God did.

Tonight I'm simply going to give us what I hope will be a two-point message, something clear that you can remember. It's coming actually from something that sprung up in my brain as I was reading this over and over again.

It actually comes from the Old King James Version of the Bible. But 1 Peter 3.18 says this, For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.

And friends, this is the question of fairness that rises up in our heart. Where is the justice in the world? And the story of Good Friday is the story of the just coming to the unjust so that we might be brought to God.

[3 : 58] So let's look at this. First, let us see how Jesus enters into injustice for us. As we look at this Matthew account, remember all that we've learned.

Let me remind you of what happened to Jesus and the injustice he faced. He was betrayed by his disciple. He was abandoned by his friends.

He was denied by one in his inner circle. He was savagely beaten and mocked by the soldiers who imprisoned him. He was handed over by jealous Jewish leaders to the Roman government for execution.

Though they found no evidence of wrongdoing, the Roman governor sent him to execution and freed instead a terrorist.

He was condemned though he was innocent. And he was sentenced to a death that was more humiliating than we would ever allow in our culture today.

[5 : 08] to be stripped, to be paraded through the streets and then to be publicly hung like a common criminal between two other common criminals.

Jesus on Good Friday understood injustice. So profoundly does Matthew tell this story that even creation itself knows how wrong this was.

Darkness covers the sky in the middle of the day for no good reason. In case you're wondering, this was no solar eclipse. It doesn't match with the Passover.

This was creation itself showing the injustice of what Jesus did and endured.

So friends, he goes before us into injustice with compassion, with courage and comfort for us.

Maybe some of you tonight have faced injustice of very various kinds.

[6 : 17] Maybe you tonight have a deep heart cry of it's not fair. Jesus understands. He's walked that road already for you.

But friends, Jesus entering into our justice is more than that. If you have your Bibles still open to the Matthew 27 passage, as we look at verses 45 and following, we see two remarkable things about what Jesus did as he entered into.

He didn't just enter into injustice by walking this road. He bore the injustice of our own sin. That may sound strange to you.

Let me explain to you what I mean by that. See, the Bible talks about sin as an offense to God. Why would that be? Because he is our creator and because he created us to know him.

And as a good and perfect creator, he created us to honor him and to follow his directions on how we ought to live rightly and good. And yet, as you well know, if you would simply think over your last week, how easily in our hearts selfishness rises up.

[7 : 33] I don't want to do it any other way. I want to do it my own way. How easily disdain fills our hearts. I think I might be better than that person. They're not worth my time.

How easily fear grips our hearts. I can't do the right thing in this circumstance. It would cost me too much. I don't want that. How easily our disregard for others, our lack of love, shows how little we regard God and how little we actually know him, follow him, obey him, or honor him.

And in this rejection of God as creator and king, it is an injustice of profound proportions. It is being a traitor to your own country.

It is being an unfaithful husband to your faithful wife. It is a child disavowing and disowning the parents who have laid down their lives for their welfare and well-being.

It is a friend. It is like being a friend who has stabbed you in the back. This is what our sin is before God. And the consequences are great.

[8 : 50] It devastates our relationship with God. It puts us under his right wrath and anger against our sin. And Jesus enters into that for us.

He takes it upon his own shoulders. He who never did anything wrong. He whose life was marked by constant love, compassion, gentleness, kindness, standing forth for righteousness.

He who did not deserve it entered into it for us. Look with me in verse 46. The cry of desolation. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Somehow, in the mystery of the Godhead, Jesus Christ was abandoned in that moment. Somehow, in that way, God turned his face away.

His regard towards Jesus could not be that of a loving father to a son because that son had taken on our sin.

[10 : 10] John Calvin says it this way. This is what we are saying. He bore the weight of divine severity since he was stricken and afflicted by God's hand and experienced all the signs of a wrathful and avenging God.

What does it mean? Another pastor says this spiritual forsakenness occurs deep down in the very Godhead itself. We dare not speculate lest we blaspheme, but something was torn in the very fabric of the relationship between the father and the son.

Jesus who had always known the father in perfect fellowship, in perfect love, now experienced some break in that relationship, some estrangement, some separation, and he did that for us.

And then you see with Matthew's remarkable understatedness that Jesus entered into it even more than the desolation. He entered into it by his death.

Look with me again, verse 50. Those who are around him are mocking him saying, why doesn't he save himself? Jesus, of course, had the power to do that if he had wanted to.

[11:34] He could have jumped down. He could have called the angels to free him. Yet he stayed there because of his great love for us. Matthew shows that he was in his full command of his faculties even to the end.

His life was not taken from him. He gave it up. He yielded it. He said, I do this for you. It is a remarkable thing that he would take on death for us.

As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans, God shows his love for us in this while we were still sinners. Christ died for us. Paul goes on, since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

For while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.

Jesus Christ, the righteous one, endured suffering the just for the unjust. And he did this to bring us to God.

[12:47] And remarkably Matthew tacks on 51 through 54. I don't know if it struck you when Elizabeth read it how odd this passage is. It feels very strange doesn't it?

What is this about? the curtain in the temple being torn from top to bottom? The earthquake?

People walking around in Jerusalem coming out of tombs?

What is this about? Well, it's what 1 Peter tells us. The unjust, the just for the unjust to bring us to God. For this is what all of these things symbolize.

The temple itself, the curtain. If you had been in the first century temple, you would have seen courtyard after courtyard and the closer you got to the center of the temple to the very place where God himself would manifest his glory among his people in a place called the holy of holies.

You have courtyard and courtyard and barrier after barrier to demonstrate to show that our sin keeps us from God.

[13:53] And inside that temple in the very inner sanctum there was a temple a veil between a place called the holy place and the most holy place or the holy of holies and no human being entered in except one the high priest and he would only go in there once a year on the day of atonement and only having offered up sacrifices for both his sin and the sin of the people and it was a curtain that was about 60 feet high and 30 feet wide no one could have easily walked through it let alone climbed to the top and torn it part of what Matthew is saying is that as Jesus died the just for the unjust what he was doing was accomplishing this salvation from sin for us where now there is this new way where we can actually have access to God himself suddenly we are no longer afraid to approach a holy

God we are no longer fearful of his judgment because Jesus has taken our penalty the injustice means the injustice of Jesus death on our behalf means that you and I can now approach God by faith in Jesus as we trust in him and take upon him take upon ourselves his righteousness and his role in our lives as our savior we can now approach God himself and he extends an invitation to all of us come in Jesus come to me and it's not just come so that you can be close to me but it's come to me and live and I think this is the meaning of this what feels like really bizarre story about people walking around

Jerusalem who had been dead the way Matthew tells it it seems there was an earthquake and the earthquake shook the tombs open tombs were often the tomb that Jesus was laid in there were caves with a rock in front of it and so the earthquake shook those rocks and so the tombs were opened again and after Jesus rose from the dead that Sunday morning people too were raised with him and remarkably he says many of them were raised and they walked around Jerusalem and many people saw them it's hard to put on a cinematographer's cap and see what this would have looked like isn't it this is way beyond our normal this is not what we would have expected and yet Matthew tells us this to say do you understand the significance of Jesus death not only has he created the doorway that's now wide open for us to come to

God but as we come to God we come from death into life again we who are spiritually dead are now brought to life in him and friends those around who saw Jesus die those who were standing there and looked up at his body broken on the cross hanging there lifeless they knew that this was not a normal death they knew that this was not a usual thing verse 54 the centurion and those with him looked up and they said surely truly this was the son of God they saw how he died they saw how the world responded to his death with earthquake and darkness and shaking and rending and

somehow they knew

Christ also has once suffered for sin the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God and so let me close with this Jesus willingly offers this so sinners may escape it Jesus abandonment means that the sinner's adoption he takes our place on the cross so that we can take his place in the kingdom because he was abandoned socially we may be children in the household of God because he was deserted emotionally we become whole again renewed in the image of God because he suffered spiritual separation we may be spiritually united to him through faith so that we will never be separated from God's love because he was forsaken we are forgiven and now he says to us I will never leave you nor forsake you it is finished

[19:12] Jesus our salvation has been completed we need only turn to him from sin and trust in him and friends as we meditate on good Friday we ought to be crying in the depth of our heart it's not fair but it's not fair it's far better than fair it's the grace and the love of God for us that Jesus would come and do this for us so that we might know him let's pray oh lord we are humbled by the reality of how great how great the cost of our sin is that we would need to die for it but lord we are even more humbled at how great the love of

Jesus is that he would come and say I will do that for you that he would offer himself up in our place lord tonight may you fill us with awe and wonder at this truth lord I pray for those tonight who maybe have seen this or understood this for the first time that they would hear the call and the invitation to come and believe and put their trust in this Jesus and lord as we look forward to celebrating not only his death but his resurrection on Sunday lord that we would be filled with joy and awe and what a great savior we have in Jesus name we pray amen.

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