

Holy Week 2017

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying,
“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Matthew 27:46 ESV)*

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” (Matthew 28:5–7 ESV)

The Death Of The Son Of God

Good Friday

April 14th, 2017

Matthew 27:11-54

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Introduction:

On your way in today you passed by signs on the doors and on the walls that said: “This Changes Everything”. Good Friday and Easter Sunday are the days that changed the world. This weekend is the HOLY CENTRE of the Christian faith. Everything else flows out from here so our task this morning is to remember what happened and to reflect upon what it means.

What Happened?

To remember what happened I invite you to open your Bibles to Matthew 27:11-54. All four Gospels narrate the crucifixion of the Lord. I’ve chosen Matthew’s Gospel because we have been working our way through the Gospel of Mark and I wanted to save Mark’s version for when we encounter in our study. Matthew’s version is kind of a like the director’s cut of Mark’s version. Matthew follows Mark but he tends to add additional detail and additional clarifying citations from the Old Testament. This is therefore a full and Biblically rich narration of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You have said so.” ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?” ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ And

they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.¹⁷ So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.¹⁹ Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.”²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.²¹ The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.”²² Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!”²³ And he said, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”²⁵ And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him.²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads⁴⁰ and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying,⁴² “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.”⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.”⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.⁴⁹ But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:11–54 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

According to the passage we have just read, on Nisan 15 in the year AD 30 or perhaps AD 33

Jesus of Nazareth was:

- i. Rejected by his people
- ii. He was falsely tried and convicted of blasphemy and sedition
- iii. He was beaten, mocked, scourged and abused
- iv. He was crucified
- v. He was forsaken of God

vi. He died

This is the central narrative of the Christian faith. This is the central fact of the Christian faith. It is so central and so foundational that the Apostle Paul could say to the Corinthians:

I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2 ESV)

This is our story – this is our song! This is our anthem, our creed, our faith and our foundation! Jesus Christ – an innocent man – more than that – a HOLY and BLAMELESS man – perfect in his obedience, humble in his service, faithful in all his conduct – was rejected and scorned, beaten and scourged and crucified to death on a cross outside Jerusalem. This is what we believe! We believe that this HAPPENED but more than that – we believe that this MEANS SOMETHING. As the poster says, we believe that THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING. IT DOES and IT CAN for YOU if you understand what it means. So let's talk about that.

What Does It Mean?

Well, it means first of all that sin is more serious than you are naturally inclined to believe.

1. It means that sin is more serious than you are inclined to believe

As we will soon discover in our journey through Mark's Gospel, the disciples did not immediately understand the sinfulness of sin or the necessity of Christ's death on the cross. In Mark 8 Jesus gives the disciples a sort of mid-term exam and they get 50% which is not a very good grade. Jesus asks the disciples:

"Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." 29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:27–29 ESV)

You are the King – that's what the word "Christ" means. It means the long awaited, Spirit-anointed King in the line of David. You are the KING from God that we have been waiting for. And that's true but its not true enough. The truth is DEEPER than that and so Jesus begins to instruct them further. Mark says that:

he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mark 8:31–33 ESV)

You have a very "manly" view of salvation Peter. You have a very shallow and naive view of sin and therefore you have a very small and inadequate understanding of salvation. You aren't ready to teach Peter, you need more time at the back of the class.

Now before we are too hard on Peter we should recognize that Peter was simply saying what most Jews in his day believed. The Jews of Peter's day did not believe in original sin – that is to say they did not believe that human beings were INCAPABLE of obeying God. They knew that human beings very often did not obey God – particularly the Gentiles – but they believed themselves capable of obeying God. They believed that people sinned, but they did not believe that people were sinners. They thought the problem was external, therefore all the solutions they sought were external. That's why you see a crowd of people in John's Gospel wanting to take Jesus and make him King by force. The Jews of Jesus' day thought that if they had better government and political advantages they could be the people God created them to be. They had NO IDEA of the seriousness of sin. And Peter is just verbalizing what every Jew around him believed. We need a King – that ought to do it.

That's why he simply had no category in his mind for the cross. When Jesus died on the cross the disciples were devastated – despite that Jesus had predicted this event with remarkable specificity on multiple occasions! They didn't get it and they still hadn't got it when the resurrected Jesus met them on the Road to Emmaus. He asked them why they were so sad and they said that they were mourning Jesus:

"a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. (Luke 24:18–21 ESV)

Do you see that? The cross DEVASTATED their theology. They thought Jesus was a prophet, they thought Jesus was a King, they thought Jesus was going to ride into Rome on a white horse and set them free from their political oppressors and INSTEAD he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and was crucified. And they DID NOT SEE THAT COMING because they did not see

themselves as sinners. The disciples thought they needed a KING, they did not know that they needed a Savior.

Now its not that the disciples were particularly stupid it is simply that they were thinking like the Jews of their age. First century Jews did not think of themselves as terrible sinners. The Jews assumed that God had chosen them because he saw in them a capacity to obey. Now, surely, much of their history had been characterized by disobedience, but that was largely to blame on bad leadership, they thought. They had bad priests, stupid prophets and weak kings – but if those people were replaced by a prophet like Moses, a renewed Priesthood and a King in the line of David then SURELY their natural merits would reassert themselves and they would BE the people God always intended them to be. First century Judaism believed that given the right conditions they could live the life they were created to live. Which is a strange thing to believe given what we read in the first three chapters of Genesis. Adam and Eve enjoyed PERFECT CONDITIONS; and yet they sinned and rebelled against their Creator – somehow the implications of that fact had escaped first century Judaism.

So what does the cross say? Well, let's go back to the story. According to Matthew 27, 3 crosses had been prepared in advance by the Romans and there were 3 men condemned to die on those crosses. In verse 16 we hear about Barabbas – apparently the leader of the group. Matthew calls him “a notorious prisoner”; Mark, Luke and John all refer to him as an “insurrectionist” – a rebel. Mark says:

And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. (Mark 15:7 ESV)

Now Barabbas was a **revolutionary**. (John 18:40 HCSB)

The Greek word used there is *lestes* and *lestes* means more than revolutionary, *lestes* means REBEL – *lestes* is a legal term and if you were convicted of being a *lestes* then you are were subject to capital punishment. That's the same word Matthew uses in verse 38 when he says:

Then two **robbers** were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. (Matthew 27:38 ESV)

That's not a very good translation, because the word used there again is *lestes* and it should be

translated as “rebel” for the simple reason that robbery was not a capital crime. D.A. Carson makes that point in his commentary on this text. He says:

“Neither theft nor violent robbery was a capital offence, but insurrection was.”¹

So, three rebels have been convicted of high treason and criminal insurrection and Jesus takes the place of one of them. Jesus dies on the cross that had been erected for Barabbas. A man whose name means “Son of the Father”. Are you seeing this? Jesus died in the place of a man whose name was Son of the Father. He died for the rebellion of a child of God.

Barabbas was intended to be with God – as all humans were - but he was a rebel and now he was outside. And so in his place Jesus went outside the city and he died on the cross meant for him. That is what the cross is saying. It is saying that your sin puts you outside the City of God. You are a rebel and you deserve to die.

Every time you sin you are saying to God – “You are not my God! You don’t decide for me! I decide for me! Your word cannot be trusted – my word shall rule supreme.”

You are a rebel, you are an insurrectionist against a holy God. You see, that’s what sin is. Sin is our attempt to de-God God. It is our attempt to become LITTLE GODS who rule supreme over our own hearts and lives. Sin is rebellion and it is a capital offense.

The disciples did not understand the significance of sin until they saw the Son of God hanging on a cross. And then it began to dawn on them. Sin offends the Majesty of God. Sin removes people from the presence and the kingdom of God and if it is not covered and paid for then it will drag us out and down into death and hell where we will be away from God, under his curse, apart from his blessings for ever. That is what the cross made clear to the disciples.

It convinced them that sin was a much bigger deal than they had imagined.

But it also convinced them that they were more loved than they could have ever hoped for or

¹ D.A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 13 Through 28*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 569.

imagined.

2. It means that you are more loved than you could ever have hoped or imagined

That is the second message contained in the miracle of the cross. The cross says that you are more sinful than you can ever have imagined but you are more LOVED than you could have ever believed. The Apostle Paul was FLOORED by this reality. He said:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 NIV11)

What kind of a King pays the penalty for the rebellion of his subjects? A king who LOVES and who would MAKE OF THEM SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

Do you understand that? That's what the cross says! The cross says that God loves us like a father loves his children! This is not "friendship love" or even "compatriot love" this is FAMILIAL LOVE of the deepest kind. Dying for someone is the highest expression of familial love. It is the sort of love that a husband might have for a wife or a mother might have for a child. This kind of love has always captured the imagination.

Do you remember the climax of Dicken's story "A Tale Of Two Cities"? The story revolves around these two characters, Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton, who look remarkably similar and who love the same woman. Charles Darnay is a French aristocrat and he has been arrested and imprisoned in the lead up to the French Revolution. He is scheduled to be executed and so Sydney Carton, who happens to be a lawyer, breaks into the prison and drugs Darnay and switches clothes with him. When the guards come in they think that Darnay has assaulted Carton and so they drag the unconscious man out of the prison and they put him in Carton's waiting carriage - but its not Carton, its Darnay. Carton stays in the prison, wearing Darnay's clothes and is executed in his place. Now, why in the world would he do that? He did it because the woman they both loved loved Darnay and Carton wanted her to be happy and to be with the love of her life. Isn't that beautiful? It is beautiful – it is beautiful because it echoes – intentionally – the story of the Gospel. That's the beauty of the cross.

The Apostle Paul put it this way. He said:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

For our sake – because God loved us so much – he came into our prison and took upon himself our filthy rags and he died in our place. We take on his clothes and we live the life of our dreams with the one who loves us the most – isn't that amazing? That's the beauty of the cross.

The cross says that sin is a really big deal. Its rebellion and its really terrible because the King we are rejecting is actually a really good king. He is just and he is good and he is wise and he is generous but we rebelled against him. We rejected him. We tried to dethrone him and we stand condemned before him. But because God loved us so much he didn't give up on us – he didn't let us die in prison – he came and he did for us what we could never do for ourselves and he paid for what we have done in his body on the cross. He did that so that we can go home and be with the lover of our souls – forever.

That's what the cross is. It's the way home. It's the place where we can leave behind our prison rags and take up the Robe of Righteousness provided by Jesus Christ and become again a Son or a Daughter of the King.

The cross is a miracle, it is a gift and it is an invitation. In Christ God is calling you to come home. Come and be forgiven. Come and be loved. The Bible says, whosoever will may come. You can come. The Spirit and the Bride say come. COME! Come unto Jesus and be saved.

That is the message of the cross. That is the Gospel and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.