

# The death of Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] We call today Good Friday. The reason is because the death of Jesus Christ is good news for all of us. But not everyone thinks so. Listen to Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist and well-known atheist.

He says this about the death of Jesus on a cross for our sins in his book, *The God Delusion*. And I quote, I have described the central doctrine of Christianity as vicious, pseudo-masochistic and repellent.

We should also dismiss it as barking mad, but for its ubiquitous familiarity with which it has dulled our objectivity. And yet, if we're going to understand Christianity, then we need to know why Jesus died.

So tonight we're going to look at the account of Jesus's death in the Gospel of Matthew. And so I'd like to continue our reading from Matthew chapter 27, this time reading from verse 45 to 54.

From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lemma sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[ 1 : 28 ] When some of those standing there heard this, they said, he's calling Elijah. Immediately, one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff and offered it to Jesus to drink.

The rest said, now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him. And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split, and the tombs broke open.

The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus's resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

Matthew records this to us as fact.

[ 2 : 47 ] But he doesn't just tell us how Jesus died. He tells us why Jesus died and what it means for us. Jesus died for our sins to open the way back to God.

And we see this in three details of the account of Jesus's death. We see it in the cry, the curtain, and the confession. So let's look at those three together.

The cry, the curtain, and the confession. First of all, the cry. Jesus cried out in a loud voice from the cross. This happened in darkness.

And so we read, from noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over all the land. Now, this was a supernatural darkness in the middle of the day.

But why? Well, throughout the Bible, darkness is a sign of God's anger and judgment. So why was God angry? God was angry at human sin and evil.

[ 3 : 49 ] Of course, sin is the wrong things we do. But our sin is also our failure to treat God as God. That's why God must judge us for our sin.

But God's anger was focused on Jesus instead. That's why Jesus cried out. And so we read, about three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eli, Eli, lemma sabachthani?

Which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus cried out because God's anger at our sin and his punishment for it fell upon Jesus.

And so while Jesus suffered the physical agony of the cross, he experienced far worse by crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus felt forsaken by God because he was judged as a sinner. On the cross, Jesus was under the curse of God while our sin was laid on him.

[ 4 : 56 ] And so he became the very worst of all that we are as human beings. All evil, wickedness, violence, corruption, depravity, rebellion was dumped on Jesus as he hung on the cross.

So Jesus absorbed the full fury of God's anger so that God's justice against our sins might be satisfied. Essentially, Jesus experienced hell in our place so we'd never have to.

Last year, I heard about the tragic death of a woman struck by lightning. She was hiking with a group near Ben Nevis and her death was described as a freak accident.

But the death of Jesus was no freak accident. Jesus was struck by the lightning bolt of God's anger at sin on the cross so that it won't strike us.

And so Jesus cried out as he experienced God forsakenness so that we need never cry the same. That's the cry, first of all.

[ 6 : 09 ] Secondly, there's the curtain. At the very moment Jesus died, the focus shifts from the cross to the curtain in the temple. We read, And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So the curtain, like the cry, helps explain why Jesus died.

The sudden rip of the curtain is full of significance. Because the curtain in the temple represented a huge barrier between people and God.

It was high and heavy and about as thick as your hand. And it separated sinful human beings like us from a holy and perfect God.

The curtain was saying that it's impossible for anyone to enter into God's presence. It was like a massive no entry sign. And yet when Jesus died, the curtain was ripped from top to bottom, making it clear that God was declaring the way back to him.

[ 7 : 23 ] The way was open, whereby we can be accepted by God through Jesus's death on the cross. Jesus paid for our sin so that no longer needs to exclude us from God.

And so the curtain is a great visual aid to say that the way is open for sinners like you and me to be welcomed by God. That's why Matthew records an earthquake followed by a series of mini resurrections.

And whatever this was like, it showed that through Jesus's death, there's going to be resurrection life for God's people. Jesus's death means we can be with God forever because a way into his presence has been opened for us by Jesus.

Jesus. I love football. It's the beautiful game. And I'd always wanted to be in the boardroom of a football club. It's an exclusive place with the very best hospitality.

But normal fans can't just walk in to the boardroom on match day. Only invited guests are allowed in. And I never had access until last year when I got to go into the boardroom of the best football team in Glasgow.

[ 8 : 42 ] I got in because of the chairman and the chief executive. And so the curtain is telling us that only Jesus gives us access to God.

And so if we don't know Jesus Christ as our saviour, then we'll be shut out of God's presence forever. That's the curtain. So there's the cry, first of all.

Secondly, there's the curtain. And then thirdly, there's the confession. The confession is that Jesus is the son of God. And so we read, when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and exclaimed, surely he was the son of God.

That's a confession of faith. And so the death of Jesus and the events surrounding it convinced those who were there that Jesus is the son of God.

It's no wonder they were terrified. The centurion had just overseen the execution of God's son. And so the centurion and those with him recognized the true identity of Jesus.

[ 9 : 58 ] Jesus was no ordinary man. Jesus is the son of God. That's why we can't miss the significance of his death. The son of God was killed as our substitute to swap places with us so that we might be saved.

Let me try to illustrate this. You may have heard of Adil El Tayar. He's been hailed as a hero doctor after becoming the first NHS surgeon to die from coronavirus in the UK.

The 63-year-old Sudanese doctor died on the 25th of March at a West London hospital. And Adil El Tayar had dedicated his life to carrying out vital life-saving operations all around the world.

And he had volunteered at an A&E; department in the Midlands to help fight the coronavirus crisis. But he tested positive for the virus and then spent his final days in intensive care before he sadly died.

By volunteering to save the lives of others, he ended up losing his own. Now Jesus Christ gave up his life in order to save us.

[ 11 : 17 ] By his death, we are saved. And yet his death was no tragic waste because Jesus willingly swapped places with us on the cross as part of God's great rescue plan for our world.

So that this life-threatening virus that we have called sin might not keep us separated from God forever. So if Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins to open up the way back to God, then we must never think that Jesus Christ has no relevance for our lives.

Because in the cry and in the curtain and in the confession, we don't just see how Jesus died, but why Jesus died.

Jesus died for our sins to open the way back to God. And so today is Good Friday because the death of Jesus is good news for everyone.

It perfectly displays the love that God has for us. That's why we must respond. And so as we close this evening, how have you responded to the death of Jesus Christ?

[ 12 : 34 ] Perhaps you've already gone to Jesus Christ to have your sins forgiven and you now enjoy a relationship with your loving creator God.

You know that because Jesus cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? You will never have to. But perhaps you wouldn't call yourself a Christian because you've never responded to the death of Jesus Christ.

Well, the message of Good Friday is good news for everyone. And that's why today is a great opportunity for you to find forgiveness and the way back to God in Jesus.

Jesus died because he had to. But Jesus died because he was glad to. And so let the message of Good Friday transform you forever.

Because Jesus died to be our rescuing savior. So go to him to be rescued. But that isn't all because Jesus defeated death as our risen Lord.

[ 13 : 41 ] That's why we'll be back on Sunday to celebrate his resurrection. And so Jesus Christ is alive today as our reigning king. And one day Jesus will come again as our returning judge.

And so the death of Jesus Christ is the best news ever. For you, for me, and for our world.

And so what I'd like to do now is to have some silence to give us all a moment to say something appropriate to God by way of response to the death of Jesus.

Some silence and then I'll finish with a prayer. Gracious God, we thank you for Good Friday and for what Jesus Christ has done through his death on a cross to forgive our sins and open the way back to you.

May we each respond in faith to what you have done for us in Jesus Christ. For we pray in Jesus's name.

[ 14 : 57 ] Amen.