

The Death of Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 April 2025

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 00] What we call today Good Friday. Good Friday because the death of Jesus Christ is good news for every single one of us.

Every year when Easter rolls around again I'm always interested to see what's picked up about Easter by the media and I'm always fascinated by the news stories which pretend to be giving a hot take on the news about Jesus and Easter.

And probably because most people are still sceptical when it comes to some of the events of Jesus' life and even whether Jesus was an actual historical person.

And so after a quick Google search this week the top hits on Jesus and Easter were and this is from the Daily Mail and the headline is first-hand evidence of Jesus' crucifixion is found in ancient Roman manuscript pretending to be groundbreaking news.

And basically the article is about the writings of the Roman historian called Tacitus. And Tacitus in his writings confirms that Jesus was executed whilst Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect in charge of Judea at a certain time in history.

[1 : 20] So nothing really new but just a new story. And then the second headline, this comes from the sun, so you can take from that what you will.

It says the exact spot Jesus was crucified confirmed as evidence mentioned in Bible that may shed new light on his death is found. And it was basically acknowledging that there was some archaeologists who had looked and they'd found that the site of Jesus' death and burial is basically matching up with what is said in the Bible.

So it's no new news. Both of these stories are basically old news. News that people take for being true because it is in fact true.

Now, no one in the ancient world ever questioned the fact that Jesus lived and died. Historians today, there's never any doubt as to the existence of a man called Jesus of Nazareth.

No doubt that Jesus lived and died. And so the issue is, well, if Jesus did live and he did die in our world, then why? Why did he come and what has his coming and his death got to do with you and me?

[2 : 38] So on this Good Friday, what we're going to do is look at the Gospel of Matthew. We've had it read for us in three chunks. Matthew chapter 27, where Matthew not only records the death of Jesus, but he records why Jesus died.

And he also is telling us what it means for us. And so we see this in three details in the account of Jesus's death. And these three details, you may have noticed those in the reading, are the cry, the curtain, and the confession.

So we're just going to think about each of these events in the death of Jesus and what they mean, why they matter. So first of all, the cry. You may have picked up from the reading that when Jesus was on the cross, he cried out.

And when he cried out, it happened in darkness. That's why we've got some of these lights switched off in here and it may be a bit more dark. And so just listen to verse 45 of our reading. From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over the land. Now, this was the time of day from noon till three when the sun was supposed to be and normally at its zenith.

[3 : 53] But not on that day. And so the land was covered in this supernatural darkness. Well, why? Well, this wasn't some kind of solar eclipse. It was supernatural because when you read through the Bible, darkness is significant.

And it's significant because it's a sign of God's anger and of God's judgment. And so the question is, well, why was God angry? God was angry at human sin and evil.

And we're all angry at evil. Now, of course, our sins are the wrong things that we do. And the things that we fail to do. But our sin is also our failure to treat God as God.

He's our loving creator. And so our sin is not to acknowledge him as such. And so because of our sin, God must judge us.

And so as Jesus hung on the cross, the focus of God's righteous anger was directed straight at Jesus. And that's why Jesus cried out in the darkness.

[5 : 05] What we read in verse 46. Eli, Eli, lemma sabachthani. Which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Now, Jesus cried out because of God's anger at sin. And God's judgment on it fell upon Jesus as he hung on the cross.

And so it's obvious when you read the accounts of the death of Jesus that Jesus suffered physically as he moved towards the cross and as he died on it. But we're being told here that he endured far worse.

His cry, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Echoes the words of Psalm 22. Psalm that we sung earlier. And in Psalm 22, David, the author, speaks of God forsakenness.

But also of his trust in God. And that's why Jesus quotes these words as he hangs on the cross. He experienced the agony of God forsakenness.

[6 : 11] And yet he trusted in God. So he had the weight of sin on his body, on the cross.

And the judgment of God falling on him. And yet he didn't abandon his trust in God. So as he hung there, absorbing the full fury of the anger and wrath of God at human sin, our sin, he did it so that God's justice could be satisfied.

So that he was punished, so that we need not be punished. Now, a few years back, I was reading a story about a woman and she was climbing near Ben Nevis.

And she was struck with lightning and died instantly. And the newspaper report that reported on her death basically said this was a freak accident.

The lightning came and just killed her. And as we read about the death of Jesus, we should never think that it is a freak accident. Because Jesus willingly went to the cross and was willingly struck by the lightning bolt of God's judgment falling on him.

[7 : 29] Why? So that it need never strike you or me. The cry of Jesus on the cross tells us that Jesus experienced God forsakenness so that we would never have to.

So there's the cry. That's the first detail that Matthew gives us when it comes to the death of Jesus. The second I'd like us to think about is the curtain.

The curtain. Verse 51 says, So when Jesus died, it's almost as if the camera shifts off of the cross and moves across the city and focuses on not just the temple, but inside the temple and the curtain in the temple and what happens to the curtain.

Because we're told that this sudden rip from top to bottom is significant. Why is it significant? Well, the temple curtain was tall and it was thick and it was heavy.

And it was there basically to separate sinful people from the holy God. So there was a great big barrier between God and people.

[8 : 48] And nobody was allowed through this thick curtain. And nobody except one man, the high priest, and only on one day of the year, the day of atonement, and only if he had the blood of a sacrificed animal for the people's sins.

And so the curtain was saying loudly and clearly that it was impossible for sinful people to get near the holy God. You could not get into God's presence because of your sin.

And so with the tearing of this curtain from top to bottom, God was saying that the way into his presence is open again. And it's open for everyone to be able to walk in.

And so the curtain was no longer a barrier because the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross made the final payment for sin and opened up a new and living way for people like us to go through.

And so God was declaring, God, he's the one that ripped the curtain. And he was saying that the death of Jesus and the sin that keeps us apart from him, well, the death of Jesus has dealt with it so that we can enter into a relationship with God, the God who made us.

[10 : 09] And that's why, as Christians, the temple and the curtain and all of the sacrifices and all of this stuff that you read about in the Old Testament has been abolished in Jesus Christ.

There's no longer any need for it. We can have access to God through Jesus. And his death means that we can live forever with God.

And that's why you may have noticed in the reading that we get a glimpse of this in this earthquake that Matthew describes, because after the earthquake, there's this series of mini resurrections of people coming back to life again.

And it's basically signifying the death of death, the end of death or the dawning of a new era, if you like, where sin has been dealt with and death has been defeated by the death of Jesus.

And so we can be accepted by God and enjoy everlasting life because Jesus died for us. And so that means that if we have gone to Jesus with our sins to have them forgiven, then we'll never be shut out of God's presence.

[11 : 21] We're welcomed in to know him and to enjoy the life that he gives. And that's why the death of Jesus is not just one day in history, a long, long time ago, that has got nothing to do with us.

It's not simply an event in history. It's an event that impacts our destiny. Because our response to what happened on Good Friday will determine where we spend eternity.

And that's why we each need to personally respond to the death of Jesus, which is the final detail to notice in the final reading. And that is the confession, the cry, the curtain, and then the confession.

It is also full of significance. And the confession comes from the centurion who was there at the death of Jesus. Verse 54 says, When the centurion and those with him who were gathering, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and exclaimed, surely he was the Son of God.

Now this was a momentous confession of faith. Because the death of Jesus and all the events surrounding it convinced the centurion and all those who were with him that Jesus is the Son of God.

[12 : 45] And it's no wonder then that they were terrified. If you're the centurion in charge of crucifixions and you've just killed the Son of God, then you've got good reason to be terrified.

And here was a man who had seen death and who had inflicted death many times. Killing people was his day job. And yet, what he recognises is that this was no ordinary death.

Because this man who had just been crucified was in fact no ordinary man. Jesus is the Son of God. That's what he cries out. And so even though you and I weren't there on that first Good Friday, the day when Jesus died, we can't actually let the events of that Good Friday pass us by.

By thinking, that's got nothing to do with me. It's a part of history. Yes, maybe a nice story. But it's got nothing to do with my life.

And yet the death of Jesus Christ has got everything to do with you and everything to do with me. Because if the Son of God came into this world to be killed so that we can be accepted by God, we can't walk away from what happened on Good Friday.

[14 : 08] And the good news is that Jesus died as a substitute. He died to swap places with us to take our punishment so that we can be pardoned.

That's a great illustration of this kind of substitution in *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, one of those books that you get to read at school when you're studying English.

And if you know the story of *A Tale of Two Cities*, it's set in the French Revolution. And the two main characters, Charles Darnay and Cindy Carton, they look very much alike.

And they both fall in love with the same woman. And she's called Lucy Manette. But Lucy chooses and marries Charles. And they have a child. And then Charles, who's a French aristocrat, he's arrested, he's imprisoned, he's sentenced to death by guillotine.

But then at the end of the novel, Cindy, who looks just like Charles, visits Charles in the night before he is due to be executed by guillotine. And he offers to exchange places with Charles.

[15 : 16] But Charles refuses. And so what Cindy does is he has Charles drugged. And then smuggles him away into a waiting carriage outside. And then Cindy takes Charles' place.

And he is executed. And then Charles and his family escape to England. And it's a really moving story. A story of substitutionary sacrifice of one man who willingly gives up his life to save another. But it's a fictional story. And the characters are made up. Whereas the story of Jesus is a true story. And it's a story that includes us.

Because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died as a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins on a cross in order to save us.

And that's why we should never think that the message of Jesus has got no relevance for our lives. Because in the cry and in the curtain and in the confession, we see not only how Jesus died, but

why Jesus died and what it means for us.

[16 : 26] Jesus was forsaken so we can be forgiven. Jesus was punished so we can be forgiven. And that's why Good Friday really is good news.

It's the best news the world has ever heard. And you will know this if you have personally responded to Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Confessing him as the Son of God. Just like the centurion. You'll know that because Jesus cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me from the cross?

You know that you will never have to cry that out. But perhaps you've never responded to the death of Jesus. Well, Good Friday is a good time to do so.

It's a great opportunity to receive forgiveness from God. And be welcomed by the God who loves you. The God who sent his Son to die for you.

[17 : 30] And that's how. That's how the message of Good Friday can change our lives forever. Thank you.