

The Death of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we gather here this evening to reflect on the death of Jesus Christ on that very first Good Friday. As you know, the death of Jesus has been portrayed in many ways, especially in many works of art.

And one of the most striking is Salvador Dali's Christ of St. John of the Cross. And it actually belongs here in Glasgow, just down the road at Kelvin Grove Art Gallery and Museum.

Dali painted this picture in 1951. And it depicts a view of Jesus from above as he hangs on the cross in darkness with the world below.

And apparently this painting was regarded as banal by an important art critic when it was first exhibited in London. And it's also been attacked twice by vandals in Glasgow.

Typical Glasgow response to anything. In 1961, it was slashed with a knife. And then in the early 80s, someone shot its protective perspex cover with an air gun.

[1 : 1 1] But the question is, well, why such a strong reaction to a painting? To a work of art? A painting of Jesus on the cross?

Well, I reckon it simply illustrates the reality that people have always had strong reactions to the message of Jesus and the cross.

Because the death of Jesus doesn't just tell us about him. The death of Jesus tells us something about ourselves. And it tells us a truth about ourselves that can be uncomfortable.

And so this evening, we're going to reflect on the death of Jesus as we see it recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Because in Mark's account of the crucifixion, he is not only recording what happened when Jesus died, but also what it means.

And he does this by drawing our attention to some significant details as he reports the events. And the first of those details is the darkness.

[2 : 1 6] Verse 33 says, So why was there darkness for three hours in the middle of the day?

This wasn't normal, of course. This was supernatural darkness. And it was a sign of God's anger and his judgment. And we get this throughout the Bible whenever there is darkness.

And the most obvious example is in Exodus with the plague of darkness, indicating God's judgment as it fell over the land of Egypt. And so here, the darkness at the crucifixion symbolizes the anger and judgment of God.

But why was God angry? God was angry at human sin and evil. Now, our sins are the wrong things we do. We know that.

And we all do wrong things. But our sin is also the way that we treat our loving creator God. And so the darkness is telling us that God's anger was focused on Jesus at the cross.

[3 : 3 0] So Jesus was being condemned, not just by human authorities, but by God and for human sin.

And that's why Jesus cries out in darkness. And his cry is the next significant and important detail. Verse 34 says, And at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lemma sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus cried out because God's anger at sin and his judgment on it fell upon Jesus. And so while Jesus suffered the physical agony of the cross, we're being told that he experienced far worse.

That's why he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And his cry echoes the words of Psalm 22, which were just read for us.

And that Psalm speaks of David's experience of God forsakenness before David himself is vindicated by God. And that's why Jesus cries out with these very words, because Jesus didn't abandon his trust in God.

[4 : 55] And yet, as he hung on the cross, he experienced the agony of being banished from God's presence as he bore the weight of human sin.

Not his sin, of course. He was innocent, but ours. Jesus was absorbing the full fury of God's anger against human sin.

A few years back, I read the tragic story of a woman who was struck by lightning near Ben Nevis, and she died instantly.

And her death was reported on the BBC News website as a freak accident. And it was. But the death of Jesus was no accident.

Jesus was willingly struck by the lightning bolt of God's judgment on the cross. Why? So that that lightning bolt need never strike us.

[5 : 56] And so the cross is telling us that God poured all of his just and righteous anger against human sin, our sin, on Jesus.

For Jesus experienced God forsakenness so that you and I would never have to. And that's what the tearing of the curtain is all about.

And that's the next detail that explains to us what the death of Jesus means. In verse 38 we read, The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

So the very moment that Jesus died, the attention shifts to the curtain in the temple. Because there's a connection between the death of Jesus on the cross and the curtain in the temple.

Now the curtain in the temple wasn't like the curtains in your house, thin and flimsy. The curtain was tall and thick and heavy, almost like a wall, a great big barrier.

[7 : 02] And it was put there in the temple to separate sinful human beings from the presence of the holy God. And nobody was allowed access through the curtain into the holy place.

Only one man, the high priest. And only on one day, once a year, the day of atonement. And only with a sacrificed animal for the people's sins.

And so the curtain was saying loudly and clearly that it is impossible for sinful human beings to enter the holy God's presence. And yet when Jesus died, this great barrier between God and people was ripped open.

Ripped from top to bottom, indicating that it was God himself who was doing it. He was opening up the way back to him so he could welcome people in.

God was declaring that through the death of Jesus, the sin that separates us from him has been dealt with. So that you and I can have a relationship with God.

[8 : 13] And that's why the temple, with its curtain and all its sacrifices, have been abolished in the sacrifice of Jesus. It's like the curtain that acted as a great big no-entry sign has been switched to a welcome sign.

Because the way we're accepted by God is through the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. Which means if we haven't received forgiveness from Jesus, then we'll be shut out of God's presence forever.

And that's why the death of Jesus doesn't just tell us about him, but it tells us the uncomfortable truth about ourselves as human beings.

Because we realize our biggest problem in life is our sin against a holy God. And our greatest need, therefore, is forgiveness for our sins.

And that's why we need to respond to what Jesus has done through his death on the cross. Which is the final detail to notice in our reading.

[9 : 28] It's the confession of the centurion. Verse 39 says, And when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, Surely this man was the Son of God.

Now this is momentous. The Roman centurion who was part of the party of people who crucified Jesus, confesses that Jesus is the Son of God.

Now this was a man who had seen death. He'd inflicted death on many, many, many people. And yet, as he stood watching Jesus die, he realizes this is no ordinary death.

Because this is no ordinary man. Surely he is the Son of God. And that's the response that Mark wants all of his readers to make.

He wants us to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The Son of God who came to die in order to save us. Which means we can never reflect on the death of Jesus on a day like today, on Good Friday, and think that it's got nothing to do with me.

[10 : 45] It's something to do with history in the past. But it has no real significance or bearing on my life. For me, one of the most moving stories in recent years was the story of the cave rescue of the Thai football team.

Where 12 boys and their coach spent 18 days inside a cave after getting trapped by monsoon floodwaters. And the dangerous rescue involved teams of Navy SEALs and an international crew of cave diving experts to rescue these boys.

Because it became blindingly obvious that if these boys didn't get out soon, then they would all die. And the amazing thing is that in this remarkable and risky operation, the rescue team had managed to save every single one of these boys.

And yet sadly, one ex-Navy SEAL, a man called Saman Kunan, died during the final phase of the operation. And yet he was hailed as a hero whose sacrifice resulted in saving this entire football team of boys and their coach.

And so as we read about the death of Jesus and as we reflect on it, the death of Jesus tells us that his sacrifice, the sacrifice of his life on the cross is what saves us.

[12 : 21] Because we're all trapped by our sin. Whether we realize it or not. And so we face the flood of God's judgment. And it will wash over us unless we reach out to Jesus to be saved.

And yet the good news is that Jesus willingly came into this world to give his life for ours. And so the only right response to the death of Jesus is to confess that Jesus is the Son of God and believe in him.

And if you've already done this, then you will want to celebrate this Good Friday because of Jesus' death for you. You'll want to celebrate every day when you wake up, knowing that the Son of God gave his life.

He suffered and died so that your sin could be forgiven. But perhaps you've never responded to the death of Jesus.

Well, the good news of Good Friday is for everybody. And so today is a great opportunity, a great time to receive the forgiveness that God offers us in Jesus and to find our way back to the God who made us and be accepted by him, be welcomed into his family to know that we're his for now and forever.

[13 : 50] God bless you.