

What exactly happened on the cross?

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Preacher: Frank Retief

[0 : 00] And I know that you never expected me here today, so I must say thank you to Nick for his generosity and graciousness. He had asked me to come next Sunday, but I discovered I was double booked next Sunday, and so he very graciously asked me to come this Sunday instead.

So here I am, surprise, surprise. I want to talk to you today about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, because in our world today, the Lord Jesus is represented in many ways, especially by those religions that are associated with New Age thinking, and those religions that reject the Lord Jesus Christ entirely.

Of course, when we think of the religions of the world, we think of the three or four basic religions of the world today, Christianity and Judaism and Islam, perhaps Hinduism or something else, or Buddhism or one of these.

But there are lots of various other religious groups in the world today. And all of them will have an opinion about Jesus Christ. They've all got some idea about who Jesus is, what he came to do, and how they should handle him.

And all of their ideas are wrong. Every one of them is wrong. And so what I want to do today is just remind you again of who the Jesus is who we worship, and why it is that we worship him and why we accept him and why we believe in him.

[1 : 23] And of course, the crucial thing about the Lord Jesus Christ, the most important thing about him, is that he went to the cross and died for us and rose again. There is no religion in the world that has got a central truth like that.

And that is what is the dynamic of the Christian faith. That is why we cling to him. That's why we believe him. But of course, to say to people today that Jesus Christ went to the cross and died there on the cross and then rose again seems so preposterous to them, it seems so unlikely that they mock us and laugh at us.

You know, Islam will agree that Jesus went to the cross and that he was nailed there, but they will not say to you that he died there. They will tell you that he was taken off the cross and revived by his followers in a cool cave and so he continued to live.

That's what they will tell you. But the death of Jesus is the problem that the world has. Because if it is true that Jesus died on the cross and then rose again, that means that everyone else in the world is wrong.

Isn't that an amazing thing? That every other faith system is wrong and everyone else in the world is wrong if what we say about Jesus and his death on the cross is right and his resurrection and his ascension.

[2 : 37] If these things really happened in history, if these things really happened in history and time and they really are true, what we as Christians say, then it means everyone else is wrong.

So of course there's a tremendous backlash against Christianity and there's a tremendous effort to try to squash what we believe or to fight what we believe or to argue against what we believe.

So you'll see programs on TV sort of anti the Christian faith or explaining away the Christian faith and sometimes people get very confused and especially in our day and age where the world is absolutely obsessed with making everybody one and Jesus is just one of the great options that we can believe.

And Jesus contributes to the whole body of truth but he's not the truth himself but he just contributes to it. He's one of the many leaders and gurus who have appeared in time and we all after all he said and done, we all believe the same thing and it's all the way to the same God.

That is what the world, that's what society out there, that is what the various organizations out there in society and even people high up in society will tell us. And it is all wrong which is why Christians

are such a stubborn bunch of people and why we are such a problematical bunch of people.
[3 : 54] And so we need to understand what it is that actually happened there on the cross for us. And I want to start off by telling you that you can't actually understand or you can't get to the cross unless you first get through the interview that Jesus had with Pontius Pilate.

Because after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Eden and betrayed by his disciples when they all fled, they took Jesus to the Sanhedrin. Now the Sanhedrin is the name that was given to the body of Jews.

There were 70 leading Jewish people in every city that formed the Sanhedrin, the ruling body that looked after all the Jewish interests. That's what they did.

And the Roman governors allowed that to happen. Judea at this time was not ruled by Jews. It was ruled by Rome. And Rome appointed a governor who in this particular instance was Pontius Pilate. And so when Jesus was arrested, they took him first to the Sanhedrin. And the Sanhedrin interviewed Jesus and they tried him in actual fact.

[4 : 57] And they found him guilty on false charges completely. And so they wanted to put him to death. But they could not put him to death because they had no right under Roman law to actually put anybody to death.

Their laws were allowed a certain amount of liberty. But after that, it stopped. And to get someone executed, they had to go to the Roman governor. And so they went to the Roman governor or the procurator who was Pontius Pilate at this time.

And the interview between Pontius Pilate and Jesus is tremendously important. And so I want you to just remember this so that as we come to the cross, you can remember what happened beforehand.

Now when Jesus appears before Pontius Pilate, he appears before a man who is greatly troubled. He is a man who has got a lot of problems on his mind. And so you must never forget this, that Pontius Pilate was a troubled man when Jesus met him.

And Jesus is put before Pontius Pilate so that the Jewish people at that stage, and let me just say this immediately, by Jewish people, I'm not talking about the mass of Jews.

[6 : 03] I'm talking about the leadership as it was constructed at that time. We must be very careful in the way which we word these things so we don't appear to be anti-Semitic. We are not anti-Semitic.

And it was the Jewish leadership of that time who wanted Jesus to be crucified and they needed Pilate's permission. And so they took him to Pontius Pilate.

Now the first thing to remember about Pontius Pilate is that he had a dodgy past. Pontius Pilate had been the leader or the procurator of the province of Judea for 11 years.

By the time that Jesus appeared before him. And his rulership over Judea was fraught with problems. He constantly had to put down insurrections and rebellions because the Jews reacted against anybody ruling over them other than Yahweh, God.

You see? They saw themselves as a state ruled by Yahweh and now they'd been conquered by the Greeks and then by the Romans and now they were under the oppression of this colonialist government, Rome.

[7 : 10] And so there were lots of freedom groups that operated amongst the Jewish people. And so Pilate had to constantly put down all of these rebellions that took place and there were all sorts of things that Pilate did as a Roman general that sometimes irritated the Jews and so there were all sorts of riots that took place.

And so Pilate's 11 years as the ruler of Judea was troubled. And in fact, any Roman governor who came to Judea faced the same problems. But Pilate's rule was dodgy.

And so he had a dodgy past when he met Jesus Christ. I think there are a lot of people who, when they hear the gospel, they hear it and they immediately think about the dodgy past they have had. Perhaps some of you sitting here today have had a dodgy past. Things have happened in your past that you regret, that you wish hadn't happened and that have somehow affected your thinking and somehow put you into a place where you're discouraged and you feel that there's no real role for you to play when it comes to God or to Christianity.

And sometimes people do feel like that. They feel discouraged. They have a very low view of themselves and they feel that there's no real role for them to play in this matter of Christianity and propagating the gospel.

[8 : 24] But you know, Pilate had a dodgy past when he met Jesus. So he came with a troubled conscience. And so he appears before Jesus as a man who is inwardly troubled.

Like lots of us, when we come to church, we come with inward troubles inside. We can't explain it to anyone. We can't talk to anyone about it. But we just feel inside that things are not right and we feel bad about ourselves and we feel twisted up about ourselves inside.

Second thing about Pontius Pilate to remember is this, that he ruled over a troubled city. The city of Jerusalem, which was the main area over which Pontius Pilate ruled, plus the surrounding area, and he ruled over the Samaritans as well, was full of trouble because the Jewish people at that stage and the Samaritans didn't get along.

So there were always problems between them. And the city was in a constant state of bubbling and boiling and turmoil, especially when it came to Passover time. Passover time, which is the time that had occurred when Jesus appeared before Pontius Pilate, was a great nationalistic time for the Jews.

It was a great religious festival when they remembered how God had rescued them from Egypt as slaves, you know, long, long years before. And when the angel of death passed over the Jewish people, he passed over them because they had blood marked on the doorposts of their houses.

[9 : 46] And every eldest child in the Egyptian households was killed that night, was slain, but not the Jewish children. And so the Jewish people remembered this.

They called it the Passover because the angel of death passed over them. So they called it the Passover feast. And this was happening right now while Jesus was standing before Pontius Pilate. People were preparing for the Passover feast. Now, this was a time of great nationalistic fervor because people would come to Jerusalem from all over the world and Jerusalem would be packed with people from every corner of the Roman Empire who were Jewish and would come to celebrate the Passover at Jerusalem.

And so the city was a troubled city, a city that could explode at any time. And all of this was happening against that background. The third thing about Pontius Pilate that I want you to remember is that he was called a friend of Caesar.

Now, the Roman governor, Caesar, there was a group of people who were raised up who were called friends of Caesar. They were a special elite group of people who, because of their past courageous actions in warfare or whatever, or their big donations toward the Roman state or whatever it was, joined an elite group called friend of Caesar.

[11 : 08] If you were a friend of Caesar, you were in a special elite group and you could be promoted to higher glory and you would be cared for in many ways. And Pontius Pilate belonged to that group.

So he must have had some kind of a good record before he came to Judea. And he was given the title friend of Caesar, which meant that he could be looked, you would be looked after and he'd be cared for and he'd be viewed with special favor by Caesar.

But if he constantly allowed the situation to get out of control, he would lose that title. So all this was on his mind at the time. That's why he was so troubled.

He was a friend of Caesar. He belonged to that elite group. And when he stood before Jesus Christ as a friend of Caesar, he of course stood in a place that was completely opposite to Christ.

He wasn't a friend of Christ. He was a friend of Caesar. And then we notice when we talk about Pontius Pilate is that he was cynical about the truth. Now, Pontius Pilate lived in an age when there was a tremendous panoply of gods that the Romans believed.

[12 : 15] They mixed up the Greek gods and goddesses with their own gods and goddesses. And there were hundreds of options you could believe in, just like in our time today. Right? He lived in an age very similar to us in that regard, in terms of spirituality.

You could believe in this god or that god and make your sacrifices here or there or go to the shrine or that shrine. And so when the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to Pontius Pilate, he says to him, you are right in saying I am a king.

This is in chapter 18 and verse 37. You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world to testify to the truth.

Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. And Pontius Pilate says, what is truth? He's got a cynical attitude about truth.

Do you see? He's saying who knows what truth is. You've got your truth. I've got my truth. Everybody's claiming truth. The people for this god believes that he is the truth. The people for that god believes he is the truth.

[13 : 20] The people for that goddess believe she is the truth. People combine three or three goddesses together and that's the truth. What is truth? Says Pontius Pilate. So he's jaded and he's discouraged and he's disappointed.

And he feels angry toward that whole system of belief because nothing has worked for him. And so Pontius Pilate is a cynic about the truth. I think it's true for many of us who sit in churches that we come to church with dodgy pastors.

We come to church not with a troubled city that we've got to rule but a troubled home over which we've got to rule. We've got to make decisions about trouble in our home. We come to church not as friends of Caesar but with no friends at all.

We come alone. We come sometimes feeling terribly alone in our problems. We come to church and we feel there's really no one that we can reach out to that's a real friend that will have answers for us.

And we come to church cynical about the whole Christian message because everything is such a mess out there. Nothing seems to work. And maybe we've reached out to God here or maybe we've reached out to God there but nothing seems to work.

[14 : 27] Everything is sort of dead. And so we are cynical. You know you can't bring yourself to say well I absolutely don't believe but yet in another way you say to yourself well I don't know if it's all true because nothing works for me.

I'm dead inside. I feel nothing when I hear the gospel message preached about Christ. And I don't relate at all to it. You know I don't want to say it isn't true but it doesn't seem to work for me.

My life is dead. My life is dead inside. My life is just spiritually barren inside. Now this is the man that Jesus met before he went to the cross. He has this man Pontius Pilate.

And Jesus proclaims to this man that he is the king. He says I am the king. See the great question that Pontius Pilate put to Jesus was this.

You are a king then? And Jesus said you are right. But I'm not the kind of king you think I am. I'm not here to sort out your rental problems. I'm not here to sort out your financial problems.

[15 : 28] I'm not here to sort out your work problems. I'm not here to make you happy in that sense of the word. I'm here to do something far greater.

If I were here for material reasons I could call on my servants. They would fight for me. Another occasion Jesus said I could call for 12,000 angels and they would come and fight for me.

No, no, no. I'm a king of another world. I'm a king of a kingdom you can't see. I'm a king who rules over your heart.

I'm a king whose disciples will extend to the ends of the earth and will respond to me with their hearts. That's the kind of king Jesus is. And of course the question is is he your king in that regard?

And if you're looking for a king who's going to sort out all your physical problems, you're always going to be confused by it. You're always going to be disappointed with the king who doesn't sort out your physical problems.

[16 : 26] But Jesus says I'm the king over the heart. I'm the king over the spirit. And that's far more important because that prepares you for eternity. And if you have not got that sort of king, well then you haven't got Jesus at all.

And that is what makes Jesus so different, you see, to all the other religious leaders of this day and age. Everybody wants something material. We want the country. We want the people.

We want the money. There's always something physical that people want when it comes to religion. But when it comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, he's looking for your heart. He's looking for your conscience.

He's looking for your spirit. That's where he rules. And he turns you into a different person and enables you to do different things and to be a different person in your ordinary daily life.

Now as you come to chapter 19, you come to the actual fact of the crucifixion. From verse 16 onwards, we have the picture of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.

[17 : 28] I won't read it because it's too long. But I want to talk to you about it. Because first of all, before Jesus went to the cross, he endured. Do you know that he endured probably two different sets of beatings?

Let me tell you, there were three kinds of beatings that Romans gave to the people who were going to the cross. All Romans gave to criminals. The first was a light kind of a beating if your crime was not too serious, just to teach you a lesson.

The second was a heavier beating if your crime was serious and you needed to be really taught a lesson. And the third was the most vicious beating of all because they knew you were going to die. So they beat you with a kind of a whip-like thing that had bits of bone and stones and all that included in the cords. And it ripped the skin of your back. And the people who were beaten often died before they got to the cross because they were beaten so severely and their body was torn apart.

Jesus underwent the first beating and then he underwent the second beating. We don't read about the first beating in John's Gospel. We read it in the other Gospels. But in John's Gospel, Jesus receives the third beating.

[18:36] And so he is a very bloodied, bruised and beaten man by the time he gets to the cross. And so the Lord Jesus Christ already, when he gets to the cross, is already very weakened by the blood loss.

In fact, they had to call someone on the way to the cross to help him carry the cross beam because the idea was the prisoners carried their own cross beam to the cross. But someone had to help Jesus to do it because he was beaten to within an inch of his life.

And then came the crucifixion itself where they took Jesus and put him on the cross and they nailed him there. And there on that hill called Calvary or Golgotha, the place of the skull, just outside of Jerusalem, they took the Son of the Living God and they put him on a cross.

They nailed his hands and his feet to the cross and properly tied cords around his wrists to keep him up there because if he died there, the flesh could rot and he could just drop off.

So they kept him up there for as long as possible and they put him on the cross with thieves on either side of him, as you know. And the amazing thing is that there on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ prays for the forgiveness of the people who put him there.

[19:46] And then the Lord Jesus bows his head and he says, it is finished, it is completed. He has completed every single prophecy in the Old Testament about him on the cross.

He has completed every single word spoken in Psalm 22 read to us today on the cross. He has completed every single iota of the will of his Father in heaven on the cross.

He has completed every bit of suffering and separation from God that we all deserve and will receive in eternity if we do not receive Christ. On our behalf, he has received it all on the cross.

He has drunk the cup of God's wrath to its dregs. He has suffered hell on the cross for us. And finally, when it's all over, he bows his head and he says, it is finished and he dies.

Now, what's interesting about that is that Jesus gives up his own life. You understand? No one had control over Jesus' life. And all that Jesus went through, he submitted himself to voluntarily because he said, I lay down my life for the sheep.

[20:57] No one takes my life from me. I lay it down. And so the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, comes down from heaven into our world.

And he lives here amongst us as a man. And he brushes shoulders with us. And he sees all the misery of humankind. He lives amongst it all. He heals people.

He sees what people are like. And then takes our sins. And he goes to the cross and says, I will pay the penalty for them. And there he gives himself up on the cross.

And finally, he bows his head, gives up his spirit and says, it is finished. And Pilate puts a note on the top of the cross to say, the king of the Jews.

And there's the ironic thing. The Jews objected to it. But he was not only the king of the Jews. He was the king of every single human being who ever lives.

[21:57] He is the king. And our problem in life, dear friends, is that we've always got to choose what king we're going to serve. It's always a choice between this king or that king.

Who are you going to serve? Are you going to serve Christ? Or are you going to serve the opinion of your family who exerts so much pressure on you? Or are you going to serve the opinion of your friends at work?

Or are you going to serve the opinions that you read about in Cosmopolitan magazine? Or are you going to just buy into the culture around about you? Or are you going to stand up and say, no, the shackles are broken.

No, I'm going to serve the king who died on the cross for me. And in dying on the cross for Jesus, every prophecy was fulfilled. Remember, they tore his clothes apart to share it. And then the soldiers, when they came to the robe, they said, let's not tear it. You know, all that was a fulfillment of prophecy, especially prophecy 22. And then the Lord Jesus cried, it is finished, and he gave up his life.

[23 : 01] Now, my friends, as I come to a close, let me just tell you that Christ's death is absolutely unique. Do you know, two men came forward to take Christ's body off the cross.

The one was Nicodemus, and the other was named Joseph of Arimathea. We never hear of Joseph before this in the gospel. Nicodemus does appear. These two men were obviously wealthy people who secretly believed in Jesus.

And at the end of it all, when Jesus' body hung on the cross, these two men come forward, and they ask Pilate for permission to take his body and bury it. Why do you think they did that?

I'll tell you why. Because if you were crucified, you were considered the worst of criminals. No Roman person was ever crucified. Only non-Romans were crucified.

And bodies were left to rot on the cross. They were not allowed to be taken down by the family members. But here are two people who are not family members, who go and ask Pilate if they can take the body down.

[24 : 07] And Pilate gives them permission, and they take the body down, and they bury the body in the cave, as we know. But just imagine that. That if you were crucified, you were left to rot until your body fell off the cross, and the wild dogs and scavengers of the air came and did the rest.

Cruel system, right? The Lord Jesus Christ drank the cup to its bitter dregs for us. That's what he did. But they came and took him and put him into the tomb.

And what do you think the purpose of that was? It was to make sure that all of us who read this gospel remember that Jesus actually died. That it wasn't a pretense thing.

He actually died. Your Savior died. His lungs stopped working. His heart stopped working. His blood vessels stopped working.

His brain stopped working. He died. And in his spirit, he experienced the unmentionable for you and for me. Now, your opponents out there in the world, some of your family members, won't believe all this.

[25 : 18] But you believe it. Because if it wasn't for the death of Jesus, there'd be no pardon for us all. And the great question is, why did he die? He died, of course, so that God could demonstrate his love for us and provide a sacrifice by which our sins could be forgiven.

He died to be a sin offering for us. He died to make it possible for you and for me to be in the right with God. That's why he died.

Do you know, this is the 500th anniversary this year of the Reformation with Martin Luther. There's a story told about Martin Luther.

I'm not sure if this is true. But Martin Luther was named after a great Roman Catholic saint whose name was St. Martin. And there was a story about St. Martin, which I can't prove to you at this point in time, but which I read in a really reliable source.

That is St. Martin, at some point in his life, he one day met an apparition of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was completely taken aback by meeting Christ.

[26 : 30] Oh, to meet Christ is the greatest honor you could have. But as he approached Christ, he looked to see if there were nail prints in the apparition's hands. And when he looked to see if there were nail prints there, the apparition disappeared.

So he never knew for his whole life whether he had met Christ or the devil. Because the devil can make himself appear in any way he wants to. And my friends, I want you to know that your Savior is the one with the nail prints in his hands.

What you've got to believe in is the one who died for you and rose again. And if anyone offers you a version of Jesus that does not include his crucifixion, and his death and his resurrection, they are wrong.

So here is the question. Is this king your king? Is this Savior the one who rules your life? And if not, will you not this very day say, Lord Jesus, I am finished with your whole life.

I am crossing the line. I am done with it all. And I am embracing you to live your way and for you forever. That's the great question. You will be my king and no one else.

[27 : 39] My king is the one with the nail prints in his hands. All right, well now let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for all that the Lord Jesus Christ means to us. We think of Pontius Pilate with his troubled inner life. And we come with our own troubled inner lives, dear Lord. And pray that you will see it and overrule it. And as we consider the question, are you a king? We pray that we may be drawn to say, yes, I am. And you are my king. Yes, you will be my king forever. And Lord, we pray that you will be with us as we seek to live for you. And as we think of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, we pray that we may see in him the greatest event in all of history. And that our hearts will be drawn to live for him forever. For Jesus' sake. Amen.