

Good Friday

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[0 : 00] With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 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.

Some women were watching from a distance, among them Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph and Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs.

Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. It was preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath. And so as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. summoning the centurion. He asked him if Jesus had already died. When the centurion said that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph.

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

[1 : 19] Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid. I want you to think this morning, what are some of the most powerful things that you know?

What are some of the most powerful things that you can think of? A lightning bolt, maybe. A lightning bolt is very powerful. It has, one bolt has over one billion volts of electricity.

That is pretty powerful, isn't it? What about a fire, a raging fire like the one on Monday night? If you heard about that in France, the Notre Dame Cathedral, a building that has stood for over 800 years, was gutted in a single night because of the power of fire.

That's powerful. These powers we see in nature. But even man-made power is quite impressive. One of the most powerful weapons ever made was a Russian nuclear submarine during the Cold War.

And this submarine, Typhoon-class submarine, if you've ever watched The Hunt for Red October, you would have seen this. It carried 20 nuclear ballistic missiles, each missile capable of destroying an entire city.

[2 : 27] That is a very powerful weapon. So powerful, in fact, that it's been banned since by international treaties, you'll be pleased to know. But despite all these powerful things that we can think of, I want to try to convince you this morning that there is something even more powerful than any of these things.

And that is the cross of Jesus Christ. We just sung the power of the cross. But I'm not sure we really realize what we mean when we say that.

I'm not sure we really realize just how powerful the cross actually is. And so what I want to do now is reflect on some of the things, the powerful things that happened around the event of Jesus dying on the cross.

Some very strange things happened. Very powerful things. And I want us to just spend some time reflecting on those things to help you see why the cross and what happened on Easter Friday is the most powerful event this world has ever known.

But first, we need to have a definition. What is power? What does power mean? Well, I looked it up, and the Oxford Dictionary definition of power is this.

[3 : 39] The ability to influence the course of events or the behavior of others. That is the dictionary definition of power. And I like that definition because it helps us to understand why the cross is so powerful.

Firstly, in how it influences the course of events. So two very powerful things happened when Jesus died. Actually, four powerful things happened. But let me start with the two obvious ones.

The darkness that covered the land and the tearing of the curtain in the temple. Very powerful supernatural events. Now, the darkness, we know it wasn't an eclipse. Astronomy tells us that it couldn't have been.

It wasn't just a cloudy day. It was a supernatural event. And even, I don't know if you know this, even non-Christian historians make mention of this event, even those who weren't in Jerusalem.

So one Greek historian, for example, whose name is Phlegon, a fragment of his writings was found. And it says this, I quote, In 202nd Olympiad, that's the year according to the Greek calendar, that aligns to 33 AD in our calendar, it became night in the sixth hour of the day.

[4 : 52] That's our 12 o'clock. So that stars even appeared in the heavens. And many other strange things accompanied this event. This was a record of a non-Christian Greek pagan historian.

This was an actual historical event. It wasn't just legend written by the gospel writers. And apparently it was recorded even as far away as in Rome. And so we know it happened.

But the important question to ask is why? Why did God do this if this was an act of God? Well, it starts to make sense when we look back in the Bible and we realize darkness is a sign of God's judgment.

You see, we've got to understand the uncomfortable truth, especially in today's world, that God is a judge. We like the idea of judges actually in civil society.

We want judges. We need judges. We want judges to execute justice well. But we get uncomfortable with the idea that God is a judge. Because, well, he knows too much, doesn't he?

[5 : 56] He knows you and he knows me more than we'd like him to know. And we don't want a judge to know that. But the Bible tells us he is the best and most effective judge in the universe.

The Bible tells us that he leaves no sin unpunished. And that should scare us. Rightly so. If we're honest with ourselves. But, what we also learn in the Bible is that he doesn't only bring justice coldly and without mercy.

God is a judge, but he is a God of mercy as well. And we know that because he sends warnings before his judgments throughout Scripture. Throughout his dealings with humankind, which is what the Bible records for us.

God has sent warnings before he brought judgment. So, for example, the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. And God's punishment of Egypt and Pharaoh for their sins as a nation.

For enslaving the Israelites and other sins. But what's interesting about that, when God judged them, and you can read this in the book of Exodus, is that God didn't just bring punishment down on Egypt right away, just out of the blue.

[7 : 06] Even to the Egyptians, he actually gave them warnings first. So, the ultimate punishment was the Passover. Very scary night. When the angel of death passed over Israel and killed the firstborn of all families who didn't have the blood of the lamb painted on their doorposts to the Jewish people.

But before that great and terrifying judgment, God sent plagues over and over again, getting each one increasingly worse.

And he did that as a warning to the Egyptians, but they ignored it. But God is a God who doesn't just judge, he warns first. And you see that, in fact, in people in wars today often do that.

So, in the Israel-Palestine conflict, which is still active today after decades, often, before the Israeli military bombs a target, like an assumed terrorist hideout or something, if that target is in a built-up area, they have a policy of warning the people in that area first.

First with a phone call, or a few phone calls to people in the area saying, we're going to bomb this target, get out of there. And then, about 30 minutes before, they send an unarmed missile to this target.

[8 : 23] So, it bangs on this target, but it doesn't blow it up. Just again, to warn people to get out of there before it's too late. You never know. Maybe the Israelis do that in honor of God being so patient with them in their sins and giving them so many warnings through the prophets before punishing them.

But be that as it may, the point is, God has every right to judge all of our sin because He is the judge, He is our Creator, He set the rules. And He has the right to judge us, ignoring our Creator in the world that He's made, using the life that He's given us for our own desires rather than the purpose for which He's given us and disobeying Him and disregarding Him, not living for His purposes, failing to love Him and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

That is sin, and it deserves His judgment, the Bible says. But, this is the good news, He does not judge us right away. He sends warnings first because He's a merciful God.

But do you know, this is interesting, do you know what the last warning was that He sent to the Egyptians before the Passover? It was darkness for three days.

And so now, as God's Son is on the cross, darkness comes again for three hours, and any Israelite standing there would have been able to work out what was going on.

[9 : 48] The darkness is a warning of judgment to come. God is preparing to bring judgment again, just like He did in Egypt, and it would have been a scary three hours for anybody who realized that.

And that's why what happens next is so unexpected. Because when the darkness finally lifts, only one person has been judged. Jesus on the cross.

The only person who didn't deserve that judgment has been judged. And that is meant to teach us something. That darkness that came over the land, and that has been recorded by historians, that they don't know what it was.

That is meant to teach us something. It is recorded in Scripture for our benefit, for your benefit, this morning. And that is meant to teach us that Jesus was taking the judgment that we deserved. So that we don't have to, if we put our trust in Him.

That judgment must come. But when Jesus died on the cross, He redirected and absorbed all the judgment for our sins on Himself, instead of us.

[10 : 56] Kind of like a lightning rod. You know a lightning rod on a tall building? It's meant to redirect the lightning, attract the lightning, so it doesn't strike other things and damage other things. And just like charged lightning, God's judgment must come on this earth.

It should hit you and should hit me. All of God's wrath for our sins that you know you've committed, even if you don't want to consciously deny it. Your conscience is there to tell you that you're not in right standing with God.

The world is messed up and broken to tell you that we as a race are not in right standing with God. The human race. And those sins that you've committed, those times you've ignored God, those times you failed to love Him and love your neighbor and live for His purposes, the reason He gave you a life.

All of God's wrath for all of our sins should one day strike us. And that is the right thing in a just universe. But on this day, on Easter Friday, when it struck this earth, it struck Jesus instead.

And in doing so, it dramatically influenced the course of events. So remember our definition of power. Power is the ability to influence the course of events.

[12 : 07] Well, Jesus dying on the cross influenced, redirected the cosmic course of events. The normal course of events is sin leads to God's judgment on the sinner. That is just.

That is right. That is how the universe works. That is how God works. That's the normal course of events. But the power of the cross changed that course of events. Because of who it was who was dying there, He redirected the normal course of events.

He redirected God's judgment away from you. And that's why Jesus knew He had to go to the cross. You heard in the narrative earlier, He told His disciples, I must go. He knew what was going to happen to Him.

He knew He had to die. He knew He was going to rise again. But He knew He had to go to the cross, even though it must have been terrifying. It is a horrible way to die. I don't want to go into the details.

Watch The Passion of the Christ if you want to see that. But Jesus went there knowing that and not turning aside. He knew that He is the only person who could redirect the course of events, who could redirect God's judgment away from you.

[13 : 12] And He wants you to know that this morning. God's judgment no longer needs to fall on you if you believe in the one who was sent to take it on your behalf. And that's the central message of the Bible.

And nothing else on earth can do that. No religion or no power that you have in yourself is able to change that course of events, to redirect God's justice away from you.

But the cross does that. And that is why it is powerful. I haven't mentioned the tearing of the curtain yet. Now, if you're a Christian, you'll know the significance of that, probably, if you've been going to church for any length of time, if you've been to church in Easter time, the tearing of the cross and its significance.

The temple where the... I mean, the tearing of the cross. What am I talking about? The tearing of the curtain. The curtain, which was the width of a man's hand, we're told. It was this huge curtain in the temple in Jerusalem.

And it used to stand as the temple was the only way people could access God. And even then, they couldn't get very close. And that's what the curtain represented. Sinners can't get close to this just and holy God and judge of the universe.

[14 : 19] But now, that temple, that way to access God, was no longer needed because of what Jesus had just done. That's why, at the moment he died, that curtain was torn into from top to bottom by God.

He was making a point. And the point was that now access to God is granted and religious works are no longer needed. And God vandalized his own temple to make that point.

Just like God allowed the Notre Dame fire on Monday. You know, it's a very sad event. And it was an amazing building. And I hope they can rebuild some of its former glory.

But God doesn't mind destroying things if they're not achieving their purpose or if they're no longer needed. And he wrecked the temple in Jerusalem because it was no longer needed now that Jesus had come and taken God's wrath for sins.

Because now anybody can come to God and be forgiven, even the least likely of people. And we know that from the very next verse. And that's the point Mark makes.

[15 : 20] As the curtain in the temple was torn into, we go back to the other side of the city, back to where Jesus is dying. And we hear this. When the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the Son of God.

A Roman centurion. Now you misunderstand how incredible this is. The guy in charge of killing Jesus. The guy whose responsibility it was to make sure Jesus died a horrible death.

The least likely person to say what he said. Not a Jew. An enemy of Jesus. And yet he was the first one to express faith in who Jesus really is.

It's incredible. And that leads to the next point I want to make quickly. The other way the cross is powerful. So remember that definition. The power is the ability to...

Let me find it again. The ability to influence the course of events or the behavior of others. Well, let's see how the cross influences the behavior of others. We have two examples of this in that passage I read. Because what happened at the cross influenced this Roman centurion profoundly.

[16 : 30] We don't actually know what became of him. We don't know whether he was baptized and he continued in that seed of faith that he expressed there at the cross. But we do know that for a moment what happened on the cross changed him.

Something supernatural happened inside of him for him to say what he said. And it was a preview of the changing power that the gospel message has and was going to have across the world.

How it was about to change the world. Because of its power to change the behavior of individual people. But I think an even better example of that power is a few verses later with Joseph of Arimathea.

And this was an equally unlikely person. He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the council who tried Jesus for execution. And who arrested him and who organized Judas to betray him.

And paid him off for that. This guy was a member of that ruling council. But now after all of this he actually throws his lot in with Jesus. By going to Pilate and risking his reputation and his position and his job to associate himself with Jesus.

[17 : 39] And to honor Jesus to give him a proper burial. It's a very risky thing to do. We've got to appreciate what he was doing. But he didn't care what he was going to lose. We're told he went boldly to Pilate.

He had bravery. He had boldness to do what he did. And what a contrast. Going to Pilate of all people. Pilate who's supposed to be the most powerful man in the land. And yet we discover he's a chicken.

Because he knows. It's amazing. He knows. If you read the gospel account. He knows Jesus is innocent. We're told that. He realizes I can find no charge against this man. And yet he still orders his execution because of the crowd's influence on him.

So the real power in this little interaction between Joseph and Pilate. The real power is not in Pilate. It's in Joseph. That's where the power lies.

[18 : 45] And it was that power to change people that changed the ancient world and caused the message of Jesus to spread by bold people who had come to believe in what Jesus did.

And that's the power of the cross to change people. And that's the power that the cross has in the events of Easter Friday. They have power to change you too.

Believe that. And so if you're not a Christian, welcome. I'm so glad you're here. But I want you to realize that we celebrate what happened on the cross because the cross is powerful.

It has real power to turn away God's justice for your sins. Because don't presume you're safe just because God is delaying his judgment. And realize he's delaying it to give you a chance to be saved.

And so if you believe this, if you believe what happened on the cross and what it meant, be baptized if you haven't already and follow Jesus.

[19 : 48] There's really no other option if you believe what happened. But if you're still wondering, if you're not sure whether you believe these events, people often need some time before they know where they stand on these things.

I want to invite you to a special course that we're starting at this church in May for the first time. And it is an opportunity for you to investigate what the Bible says in a relaxed setting.

And you can ask any questions that you want, even the most difficult ones. I don't guarantee that I'll be able to answer them, but you can ask them. You're welcome to. And it's a course open no matter what your belief is, no matter what religion you were brought up in.

It's a way for you to explore. And so I do invite you to come to that course. It's called the I Believe course. You should have received a flyer in your notices. Keep that.

And do book if you want to come to that. But if you are a Christian, in closing, I want to challenge you to keep letting the cross change you to be more bold like Joseph.

[20 : 49] To stand with Jesus no matter what it might cost you. And it will cost you. But of course, there's another reason the Christians of that day and the Christians today can be bold even to the point of death.

And that is because they know for sure that death is not the end. But more on that when we see you on Sunday. I'm going to pray. Lord, we thank you not only for what Jesus did for us on Friday, all those years ago.

But we thank you that you inspired people to record these events for us so that we can look back on them and understand what they mean for us today. We do pray, Lord, that you would help us to respond rightly to what we've heard.

Guide us by your spirit as we respond. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Ladies' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[21 : 59] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ■■■. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Okay.

Hallelujah. Amen.