

The Purpose of Christ's Death

Bible Reading - John chapter 12 verses 20 to 36 (NLT)

'Some Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration ²¹ paid a visit to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee. They said, "Sir, we want to meet Jesus." ²² Philip told Andrew about it, and they went together to ask Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, "Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. ²⁵ Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity. ²⁶ Anyone who wants to serve me must follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And the Father will honour anyone who serves me.

²⁷ "Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, 'Father, save me from this hour'? But this is the very reason I came! ²⁸ Father, bring glory to your name."

Then a voice spoke from heaven, saying, "I have already brought glory to my name, and I will do so again." ²⁹ When the crowd heard the voice, some thought it was thunder, while others declared an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Then Jesus told them, "The voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. ³² And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate how he was going to die.

³⁴ The crowd responded, "We understood from Scripture that the Messiah would live forever. How can you say the Son of Man will die? Just who is this Son of Man, anyway?"

³⁵ Jesus replied, "My light will shine for you just a little longer. Walk in the light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. ³⁶ Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light."

After saying these things, Jesus went away and was hidden from them.'

SERMON

Three times in all four Gospels, just prior to Holy Week, Jesus told His disciples He was going to be crucified and that He would rise from the dead. They didn't understand Him - and in fact Peter was in total disbelief - and he took Jesus aside and reprimanded Him for saying such things. Then according to Matthew and Mark's account of this event, Jesus replied to Peter (NLT) ***"Get away from me, Satan! You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."***

I mentioned to you last month that Satan can indeed speak to us through trusted friends and so we have to test what we are told by well-meaning Christians against the truth of Scripture.

The Bible reading we have just heard from John's Gospel is typical of what is read out in Churches on this day, the second Sunday before Easter. I will spend a short time looking at this passage but, as I said during my introduction to the service today, I intend to cover briefly the events of Holy Week and Easter as well. In verse 23 and 24 it says

"Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone."

'Enter His glory? A Kernel of wheat dying? What is Jesus talking about?

Well, Matthew, Mark and Luke's accounts of this same event are in more simple English – Jesus is recorded **by them** as telling His disciples this:

"The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but three days later he will rise from the dead."

That makes sense. Now returning to John's Gospel reading, it goes on to tell us that Jesus has set off on the last leg of His journey on Earth to Jerusalem, because He knew His time had almost come.

Before He goes to the Cross, He warns His followers that we must turn away from a fleshly life – in other words a life based on our desires and wishes for ourselves. If we want to be with Christ in Heaven when we die we have to put others and their needs first in this life.

In other words, our objective must be to love others as Christ loves us.

I know that isn't easy in our natural fleshly state but, if we are walking in the Spirit, then it is much easier to lay down our lives for others.

Jesus says in verse 25:

“Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity.”

He then expresses the pain He feels in His soul as he prepares for His Crucifixion. He says:

“Now my soul is deeply troubled. - Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But this is the very reason I came!” No, instead He says ***“Father, bring glory to your name.”***

How might we have prayed, if we knew we were going to our death, and there was the possibility of God intervening and preventing the pain and suffering of crucifixion?

God then speaks from Heaven, confirming that He is going to bring glory through Jesus' death on the cross, but some in the crowd that day thought it was a thunder clap while others imagined it was an angel talking.

Jesus then tells the crowds clearly that by being crucified (He uses the expression 'lifted up'), He will save the World. But many still struggled to believe His claims, and so they argued with Him that the Messiah would live for ever so Jesus couldn't be the Messiah if He was going to His death.

You see our human minds, clever as some people are, are just terribly limited in their ability to comprehend the ways of God. Those people had no idea God would allow His Son to die for the sins of the world, only to bring Him back to life again in an amazing defeat once and for all of death, and the schemes of the devil.

You will recall last month I reminded you that Jesus told us that Satan was the ruler of this world and is responsible for all the terrible things that are happening in the world. The scripture I referred to last month is verse 31 of today's Gospel reading, and here Jesus says: ***"The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out."***

Jesus was going to the Cross in order that Satan would be cast out.

At the end of today's reading, Jesus tells us to ***"Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light."***

The only way of salvation, as I have said countless times here on many Sunday afternoons, is for each of us to put our trust – not in the prince of darkness (the devil) but in the Prince of Light – Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Living God!

Now, moving on to Palm Sunday. That was the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfillment of the Biblical prophecy in the OT book of Zechariah, chapter 9 verse 9 ***'Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey'.***

As Jesus arrived in the city, he wept for the people. During that week (what the church calls Passion Week) He overturned the money changers tables as He expressed His anger at how men - who should have known better - had turned His Father's House (The Temple) into, as He called it, a den of thieves. He spent some time with His closest disciples, while the religious authorities were working behind the scenes in darkness, working out how to bring Jesus to His death.

During this time, Jesus and His disciples meet and have supper together for the last time. He breaks bread and pours out wine for His disciples and tells them that this is something they and their descendants are to do in remembrance of Him. He tells the 12 that one of them will betray Him. They cannot believe Him; each one in turn asking "Is it I?"

Scripture tells us that the devil entered Judas Iscariot; he, it was, who would betray Him,

That very same night, later - after supper - it happened. Jesus and a number of His disciples had gone to spend some time in prayer in the Garden of

Gethsemane. And there it was that Jesus was arrested, taken away to Pilate to a so-called 'trial', sentenced to death, tortured until He bled from His wounds, led out to a Cross and made to die a most horrible death.

All of us here today, I am sure, know the Easter Story and some of you, like me, may have watched Mel Gibson's film entitled 'The Passion of The Christ', the director's gripping and - in part - gruesome portrayal of how that Good Friday morning may have unfolded, based on the words of Scripture.

Whilst some people found the film offensive, it changed forever my own understanding of what our dear Lord went through, how much He suffered willingly for you and me and in fact for **every** human being that God has ever created.

Graham Kendrick wrote a simple chorus and for me the words are very profound:

Such love, pure as the whitest snow
Such love, weeps for the shame I know
Such love, paying the debt I owe
O Jesus, such love

Jesus' crucifixion happened during the feast of Passover. It was important to God, that Jesus' death would take place during that feast. Why was that? God's timing is perfect.

The Jewish festival of Passover is a celebration of the event that happened when Moses lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, nearly 1500 years before the death and resurrection of Christ.

As you may recall, the blood of a one-year-old lamb or goat **without blemish** had to be put on both door posts and the lintel of the homes of every Israeli family, because God was about to send the angel of death to kill all the Egyptian first born children and animals. This was God's wrath at the rebellion and sin of the then Pharaoh; the Egyptian Emperor.

The sign of the Passover lamb's blood would ensure that the Israeli families would not die but obtain freedom from life-long slavery.

Jesus' death on the cross and the shedding of His blood, in effect, did the same thing for you and me.

Last Sunday, after I had begun to draft today's sermon, I picked up - from a visiting speaker at St Paul's Church - this brochure entitled 'Christ in the Passover'.

In it we learn the full relevance of Passover and how God instigated the Passover, not just to set His people free at that time, but also as a pointer (if you like) to how Christ, nearly 1500 years later, would become the Passover Lamb. A final sacrifice to bring to an end all sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin.

Read through Exodus chapter 12.

Jesus is the pure sinless Passover Lamb and His death on the Cross ensured that our sins could be forgiven once for all, bringing to an end, the centuries old established pattern of blood sacrifices God set up in the time of Moses by God for the forgiveness of the peoples' sins.

Belief that Jesus died for us, so that our sins (committed in the past, present and future) are forgiven, coupled with genuine repentance – turning back to God when we sin – allows God's Holy Spirit to live inside of us. It's what happens when we are 'born again'. And this ensures our salvation. As the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 1 verse 22 and in two other places (Three times so we do not doubt) ...

'God anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.' – That is, our salvation.

If we accept Jesus as Lord of our life, His death also ensures we are set free from the slavery of sin. It doesn't mean we won't sin, but when we **do sin** it is vital that we come to God and confess our sins and then repent of them. We must keep turning away from them and obey God and let His Holy Spirit guide us through life. It is by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God that we can walk in freedom from the desire to sin.

If you haven't yet asked Jesus to be Lord of your life, and you would like to know and experience what it is like to be set free from the power of sin, and walk in the Light of Christ with a new-found peace and joy, please can I encourage you to speak to me or Michele before you go, so that we can pray a simple prayer with you inviting Jesus into your life.

For, as we are told in Acts 4 verse 12:

'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved!'

Our salvation is the whole purpose of the Easter message. It is then up to each individual to respond to God's offer of salvation and eternal life with Him in Heaven.

There really is no other way. It's not about trying to work our way into Heaven. It's all about responding to God's offer and believing in Jesus Christ.

Jesus says in John chapter 14: "I am the Way the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Me."

If you haven't already, this Easter, why not invite Jesus Christ into your life? You will NEVER regret it....

AMEN!

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