

Good Friday Service

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: 06 April 2007

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] I want to direct you, if I can, to these words from Matthew's Gospel that we read together. It's terribly easy for the message and the Easter story to become one of mere sentimentality.

The Christian symbolism just takes its place in the midst of the daffodils and the chickens and the spring flowers and the bunnies, all part of a lovely pastiche of sentimental springtime cheer, all about new life emerging from winter and summer just being around the corner, that kind of thing.

I guess a few years ago, Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, struck a blow against that kind of sentimentality with its graphic scenes, with its harrowing scenes of the barbarity and the ugliness of crucifixion as a means of torture and death.

But that, too, can also lead to just another different form of sentimentality, aimed to evoke sympathy and tears.

Poor, poor Jesus. A kind of devotion of empathy. I listened to a meditation on the radio this morning about Easter, which took exactly that line.

[1 : 22] But, in fact, the Gospel writers themselves are very, very far away from any such emphasis like that. What they actually write for us about Jesus' death is something very, very different.

Because, first and foremost, they're not concerned just with relating the story of Easter. No, they are proclaiming the message of Easter.

And that is a very different thing. Look at verse 35 of our passage here in Matthew 27. Just five words describe the actual crucifixion.

Mel Gibson's film took hours of excruciating agony. But here, just five words from Matthew. When they had crucified him. Isn't that striking?

Why is that? Is he playing down the horror, the physical brutality of it? Well, no, not at all. Of course not. But he is focusing, not just on the physical horror, which is indeed very brutal and barbarous.

[2 : 28] No, he's focusing, actually, on something far, far greater. A far worse horror than that. Matthew wants us to focus on what is really the appalling truth.

Something that's revealed more plainly at the cross of Jesus than anywhere else in all history. And that is this. The reviling hatred. The sheer contempt. The rebellion.

The venomous opposition of human beings for their God. The God who created us. The God who owns us. Human beings hate the one true God.

They are enemies of the true God. Now, that might sound strange, but that is exactly what Matthew is telling us in his account of the crucifixion. You can look at it.

You can see the way that he's structured his drama around these things just to bring home that reality with force. Right in the centre of the passage. Look. It's the crucifixion of Jesus.

[3 : 31] But what's going on all around? Well, it's the hatred of enemies, isn't it? The shouts and the taunts of mockers, reviling, deriding him.

Do you see how shocking this is? This is the climax of Matthew's whole gospel, his story. This is the climax of God's revelation of himself to humankind. Here is Emmanuel, God with us.

And he is mocked. And he's derided. And he's reviled. And he's spat upon. And he's beaten. And he's rejected. You won't find a more graphic display anywhere else in the world of the reviling hatred of humankind for God than you see here in this account of the cross of Jesus Christ.

And yet in the midst of this reviling hatred of the world for God, in the midst of it, Matthew is also proclaiming the climax of God's redeeming love for the world.

For a world that hates him. Before Jesus' birth, the angel said, you will call his name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

[4 : 56] Just before Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, he said, I came not to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. And this is what he meant. To show the wonder of his redeeming love in the midst of a world of reviling hatred for the Redeemer himself.

Nowhere in the whole of the Bible will you find a more graphic portrayal of Paul's extraordinary words when he says, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

And that's what Matthew is showing us here. Just look first at the reviling hatred of the world for God in these verses. That's what's described in these slanderous accusations that are all around the cross.

The Son of God faces the wrath of all mankind against God. There can be no mistaking the allusions that Matthew is making here to the Old Testament, to the prophet Isaiah.

Every one of his Jewish readers would have recognized it immediately, knew exactly what he meant. the suffering servant of God, the one who was despised, rejected of men, a man of sorrows, a man acquainted with grief.

[6 : 16] You know those words, don't you? Even if it's just from Handel's Messiah. And here is Jesus, despised, rejected by all the world.

If you read through Matthew's Gospel, if you read through his whole Passion story, you'll know that already by this point his disciples have abandoned him. That's why in verse 32 we're told that this complete stranger from the crowd had to be dragged out to carry Jesus' cross.

There wasn't a disciple in sight. He'd been abandoned, rejected, even by his friends. He's been betrayed by the Jewish authorities. He's been betrayed by the secular state, by Pilate, the governor.

Now in verse 27, even the common soldiers are mocking him, abusing him in front of everybody. Carries on on the cross itself. Verse 39, even the passers-by deride him.

Verse 41, the religious people deride him and mock him. even verse 43, the common criminals, the thieves on his right and his left, they also reviled him in the same way.

[7 : 27] It's utterly perverse, isn't it? Every one of these people knew that he was completely innocent. Every one of them knew that there was nothing to put him in that place and on that cross.

But all the world reviles Jesus Christ. Well, that's just simple reality because man hates the one true God.

Just read the Bible from the beginning. That's the story right from the very start. It's the story of human history. It's the story of human beings shaking their fists at God. No surprise when we read this in the Gospels, when God himself confronts men and women in the person of his Son, it's no surprise then that the hatred erupts in a zenith of ferocity.

Kill him! Get rid of him! We don't want this kind of God. We won't have this kind of God. Well, here it is. It's all out in the open.

That's Matthew's point. That's what he's telling us. The whole world, the whole world hates the truth about God. people will often say, of course, well, I've nothing against God if there is a God.

[8 : 46] But you see, that just isn't true. And that untruth is exposed when people are actually confronted with the person of Jesus Christ and the message of Jesus Christ and his cross.

And that's what Matthew is showing us here. Do you see? Verses 27 to 31, on that first section, shows us so clearly how the secular world hates the one true God.

Here, it's the secular world. It's the pagan soldiers. And they will not have the rule of Jesus Christ. They will not have the exclusive lordship of Jesus. They will utterly deny and mock, therefore, his kingship.

Hail, King of the Jews, they say, verse 29. They spit on him. They strip him. They beat him. That's what we say to your claim to rule over us. Well, that's just what the secular world still says about Jesus Christ, isn't it?

Our secular world will never have Jesus Christ as a unique King and Lord. Our secular world will never have the kingship of Jesus Christ to crush our pride, to crush our self-rule, to demand that we should live our lives in alignment with him and his words.

[10 : 03] Never. That's why in our secular society today and every side the name of Jesus Christ is still mocked and derided and scorned and ridiculed.

Every day in the secular media Jesus Christ suffers the wrath of the secular world. He's slandered by the comedians.

He's slandered and mocked by the snide columnists in our newspapers, by the sanctimonious interviewers on our radio and television. There's reverence of course for virtually every kind of mumbo-jumbo under the sun.

Get some complete crank with some bizarre religious nonsense on the radio and they'll be very interested. There's great reverence of course for the prophet Muhammad who's never spoken of without being given his title peace be upon him.

But not for Jesus Christ. He's still mocked, he's scorned, he's reviled. Because of course to accept his kingship would mean utter revolution.

[11 : 12] Our self-rule would be turned inside out, wouldn't it? We'd be overcome by one who is Lord of all and therefore Lord of my life and therefore tells me what to do and how to live and how not to live.

But we won't have that. So we mock and we scorn and we deride. That's secular thinking about Jesus Christ. It hasn't changed.

It rejects utterly the kingship of Christ. And I know lots of people just like that. I'm sure you do. Maybe you're one of them today.

Well, let me tell you if you reject the lordship, the rule, the kingship of Jesus Christ then you mock him. You revile him.

You spit on him. You scorn him just along with these soldiers. That's the secular world. But let me tell you this. The religious world is no different at all.

[12 : 12] Verses 39 to 44. Look at them. They tell us, don't they? They tell us that where the secular world mocks and scorns Christ's lordship and can't abide that assault on its pride, these verses show us that the religious world also hates the one true God.

it will not have God's way of salvation. Therefore, it mocks, it derides his sacrifice, his cross. It's one of the staggering things as you read through the Gospels about Jesus to see the vitriolic opposition that there is to Jesus Christ from the very religious establishment, from the churchment of Israel.

And here it is at its absolute zenith. Well, really, it's absolute nadir, isn't it? Look at verse 41. So also, the chief priest, the scribes, the elders mocked him.

Mocking, look, verse 42, specifically what? His saving death for sins. This death can't save. He can't save. He's no savior. You must come down off that cross if we're going to believe in you.

And that's the cry of the religious leaders, the bishops, the moderators, the theological teachers of the Church of Israel. That's who they are.

[13 : 31] You see, the cross is the great stumbling block for the Jew. They simply couldn't accept a suffering, a sin-bearing savior. And nor can religious man today, whether they're Jew or Muslim or apparently Christian.

It's just the same. Why is that? Well, it's because just as the kingship of Jesus is a terrible blow to our self-rule, so Jesus' salvation through his cross is a sin-bearer, is a ransom for us.

That deals an absolute death blow to our pride and our self-merit. You see, the cross speaks of sin that must be punished. The cross speaks of God's anger that separates us from him.

The cross speaks of our helplessness, utterly helpless to help ourselves in any way at all. And we hate that. We don't want to be helpless and to be condemned and to be judged as unrighteous in God's sight.

Surely, the whole point of religion is that we can help ourselves. Surely, we can do our duty, we can fulfill our requirements, we can put God in our debt and then God must accept us. You see, the true message of the true God in the cross of Jesus Christ utterly shatters that delusion.

[14 : 56] It forces our religious pride right into the dust because in the crucified Jesus, we see that the only way to be right with God is that our sin, our penalty, must be paid by another.

because it's so great, it's so terrible, it's so culpable, nothing other than the very death of the Son of God Himself can redeem the tragedy, can reconcile us to God whose holiness cannot look upon our sin but must punish our sin because our sin is real and terrible and an affront to His holy majesty as Lord of all the earth, as our maker, as our ruler.

And man can't stand that that should be the truth about the way to God, especially religious people and nothing has changed.

It's always Easter, isn't it? Always Easter that brings a rash of derision and mockery and reviling of the very notion of the cross as a sacrifice for sins.

Let Him come down off the cross and then we'll believe in this kind of Jesus. Remove any idea of a sacrifice for sins, of an atonement for sins, of a turning aside of the wrath of God.

[16 : 15] Remove all of that, then we can have Jesus. But the other, the theology of the slaughterhouse, cosmic child abuse, making God like a psychopath, oh, we can't have that.

We can't have that Jesus, that Jesus, we mock, we deride, we despise. Not a Jesus on the cross for sins. And therefore, there are many who, in fact, show themselves to be enemies of the true Jesus Christ, even though they write in our newspapers, representing the church, they speak on the radio, on the television, of a Jesus who's come down from the cross.

But proclaim the true Jesus, the Jesus on the cross as a sacrifice for sins and you unleash the wrath of man against God. And especially the wrath of many a religious man.

Because that Jesus, the true Jesus, deals a death blow to our pride. The reviling hatred of the world for the one true God made known in Jesus Christ.

That's what Matthew is forcing us to see here. And don't underestimate the reality of the pressure on Jesus, the sheer weight of the temptation to answer their mockery, their reviling, with a display of awesome power coming down off the cross to silence them utterly.

[17 : 47] He could have done that. He could have silenced them. But then he could not have saved them. And to save them, he rather silenced himself.

Did you notice that stark contrast? The loud shouting, the pervasive din of the mockery of Jesus Christ and yet from Jesus? Not a word.

Well, you see, in the silent acceptance of Jesus, in the face of the scandalous, slanderous accusations against him, Matthew is showing us God's answer to the reviling hatred of the world for him.

in the redeeming love of God for the world. He's showing us not just Jesus as King, but as the Saviour, as the servant King.

Facing not only man's wrath against God, but far worse, God's wrath against man as the sin bearer, as the Saviour, as the great reconciler of enemies to God.

[18 : 55] And again, there's no mistake, Matthew's readers all understood. See Jesus silent among the mockers and listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Like a lamb led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Why was that? Because Isaiah says, we all, like sheep, have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He bears his people's sin. And that's why he's silent. That's why he can't come down from the cross as verse 42 taunts him.

It's that he will not come down because he's there to save others. He's there to bear their iniquity. And God, in verse 43, when they cry out to him, God will not deliver him from death because Jesus Christ was made sin for us so that he faced also the wrath of God against man so that he would deliver others just as Isaiah the prophet had said, my servant shall make many to be counted righteous.

He shall bear their iniquities. And so Jesus is silent in the midst of the slander of the world to show the redeeming love of God for the world.

[20 : 32] The world that mocked him and reviled him and despised him and crucified him. And yet his silence and the silence of God the Father in not saving Jesus from the cross, the silence is the very thing that proclaims the very deepest truth about this God, the one true God, the living God.

It tells us that this true king of the world, Jesus, as verse 37 says, the king of the Jews is not only the king of the world, but he's the savior king.

He's the servant king. He's the one who came to give his life as a ransom for many. This man upon the cross bearing the wrath of man and the slander of man and also far more bearing the wrath of God against the sin of man.

He is Emmanuel. He is the God whose redeeming love will save his people from their sins this way, the only way.

The slander, the mockery, the reviling that surrounds the cross speaks like nothing else does of the hatred of this world for its God.

[21 : 58] The sheer reviling hatred of enemies. And it's the message of the cross still today that arises exactly that same hatred, that reviling and that mockery.

But the silent acceptance of Jesus in the midst of all that reviling mockery speaks like nothing else in all creation of the redeeming love of God.

Of the saving heart of God for those whose bitter hatred of him mocked him and derided him and reviled him and crucified him. While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

And even the wrath of man is made to praise our redeeming God because in the deepest and darkest rebellion of man, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

Friends, the world has always hated and will always hate the one true God. That's made so plain in its attitude to the one true Jesus, the Jesus of scripture, the Jesus of history, the Jesus of the cross.

[23 : 21] It hates him. And every one of us has been an enemy of God, whether we knew it or not. If we have ever denied his lordship, if we have ever resisted his sacrifice, we are among the enemies around the cross of Jesus Christ.

And you may be, even at this very moment, whether you know it or not, an enemy of the one true God made known in Jesus Christ. Christ. But listen, by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ has been proclaimed to be the Son of God with power.

He has been designated to be the Lord and the judge of all the earth and of all his enemies. And a day has been fixed when he will judge this world in righteousness. And friends, I have to tell you that on that day to be found as an enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be to bring upon yourself catastrophic consequences for all eternity.

But, because of his redeeming love, this day, today, is a day of grace and of mercy.

There is reconciliation through the cross of Jesus Christ, even for enemies. And now is the time, says the gospel, when all men everywhere are called to repentance, that is, to turn away from your mockery and your reviling, to bow to the lordship of Jesus Christ as king of the world, to embrace his sacrifice as the saviour of the world.

[25 : 05] Now is the day of salvation. And that's the message of Easter, that's what it means. It's a message for enemies of God, yes, a message of reality and of warning, of stark warning, but a message of redemption and of hope and of glory and of salvation.

If you have embraced that message, if you will embrace the message of Christ crucified. And it is a real hope. Listen to what Paul says, for if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Life that is eternal. That's the Easter message. That's what it's all about. That is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's only one response, isn't there, to that message?

Receive his reconciliation. Rejoice in his reconciliation. And receive the life in his name that he promises to all who will bow to him.

And love his lordship. And love his sacrifice for your sins. May God grant every one of us here today the rejoicing of those who are reconciled to God in the death of his son.

[26 : 38] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.