

### 3. The fulfilment of Scripture

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let us bow our heads together and join our hearts in prayer. I'll lead in some words of prayer now. And let's together, in our hearts, approach the great God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the one who has given us a great gospel.

We've just sung the words, for us he was made sin. Picking up the words of the Apostle Paul, that the one who knew no sin was made sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God. Our gracious Father, we thank you so much that the Lord Jesus was prepared by your gracious will to become sin for our sake, even though he knew no sin in himself.

We thank you, dear Father, that it was always your purpose, from before the foundation of the world, to prepare him, your only Son, your true Son, to come to the earth and to take on our human flesh with all its frailty and vulnerability, and yet without the sin that clings to our hearts and in which we're born.

And yet it was your gracious purpose, dear Father, to bring him to the earth so that he might bear our sin and that we, through the cross at which he was crucified, might have our sin transferred to him so that we should be set free from its burden and penalty.

[ 1 : 47 ] How we thank you, dear Father, for this gracious act. And we acknowledge that this is the act upon which our faith rests and our sense of joy and relief springs, that our sins have been taken by him.

And we think, dear Father, of the resurrection on the third day and of the way in which you thus publicly vindicated him and showed that the sacrifice that he had made upon the cross was acceptable to you.

So we thank you for these great historical facts upon which our faith rests. And we pray, dear Father, that you'll warm our hearts afresh and give us a fresh sense of thankfulness today as we think of the death of Jesus recorded by John the Evangelist.

We pray that you'll help each one of us to have a new sense of courage and joy as we live the Christian life and as we share the Christian faith with others.

So please have mercy upon us. Open our ears and our hearts to hear your word, to take it home and to rejoice in it. And we ask it in Jesus Christ's name.

[ 3 : 02 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, let's turn together to John's Gospel, chapter 19. And if you have one of our big visitor's Bibles, you'll find this on page 905.

905. I'm going to pick it up from partway through verse 16. We've just had a conversation between Pontius Pilate and Jesus and the Jewish leaders.

And you'll see at the beginning of verse 16, Pilate capitulates to the pressure of the Jewish leaders and he hands Jesus over to them to be crucified. So reading from the end of verse 16 now.

So they took Jesus and he went out bearing his own cross to the place called the place of a skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side and Jesus between them.

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross.

[ 4 : 08 ] It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, many of the Jews read this inscription for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin and in Greek.

So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, do not write the King of the Jews, but rather this man said, I am the King of the Jews. Pilate answered, what I have written, I have written.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

So they said to one another, let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be. This was to fulfil the scripture, which says, they divided my garments among them and for my clothing, they cast lots.

So the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

[ 5 : 24 ] When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, behold your mother.

And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home. Well, thanks be to God for these words of his from the gospel.

I'll just take a sip of this fine Clyde water. I can feel a frog.

Good. I imagine a number of you here saw several years ago that much talked about film made by Mel Gibson called The Passion of the Christ.

I didn't see that film myself. And the reason for that was that I read various reviews and I was talking to different people who'd been to see it. And they told me that the crucifixion of Jesus was portrayed with extreme violence.

[ 6 : 29 ] And I think I sensed that I couldn't emotionally cope with looking at that. So I just didn't go. It may be that in the goodness of God, that violent film did bring the reality of Christ's sufferings home to a number of people and brought them to faith in Christ.

I do hope so. But I raised that question of Mel Gibson's film. And you'll have heard about it even if, like me, you haven't seen it. I raised the question because the description we have of the crucifixion of Jesus here in John chapter 19 is portrayed very differently.

The violence is briefly mentioned, but only in the most understated way. So for example, in verse 1 here in chapter 19, John tells us that Pilate took Jesus and flogged him.

It says no more. There's no mention of the type of whips used or the number of lashes that Jesus received or how many soldiers were dealing out the whipping. No details, just the bare fact of it happening.

And when we get to verse 18, if anything, it's even more understated. Look at the way John puts it in verse 18. He simply says, there they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side and Jesus between them.

[ 7 : 43 ] No mention of nails and hammers. No phrases used like unbearable pain or the splintering of bones and sinews. No direct mention of blood or sweat or stench or anything else of that kind.

John spares us the vivid and the gruesome details. So you sense that the last thing he is doing in his telling of this story is trying to manipulate our emotions.

Now the typical modern film, not just Mel Gibson, but almost any modern film you think of is in the business of trying to squeeze our emotions for all they're worth.

You might almost say that the essence of modern filmmaking is to give the viewer a powerful emotional experience, even perhaps to batter the emotions. Now John is not like that at all.

He tells his story in a very plain, matter-of-fact way. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell the story in exactly the same way in this respect. So why does John not treat his subject matter as the modern filmmaker would want to do?

[ 8 : 51 ] Why doesn't he seek to wring our emotions in the way that Mel Gibson might want to? The answer must be that John is interested in something else.

There's something else that he wants the reader to see. Now you know that John's Gospel is a kind of sermon, a sermon in 21 chapters. And in this sermon he's trying to persuade the reader of something very important concerning Jesus.

Just turn over a page to chapter 20 and verse 31, if you will please. I pointed this out last week but I think it's good for us to see it again. In verse 31 of chapter 20, John says that he's written these things down so that you, that's the reader, so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So that is the agenda that shapes everything in these 21 chapters of John's Gospel. John is seeking to lay out the reasons why any reader, Jew or Gentile, and he was writing for both, why any reader should come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, that is, God's anointed King, God's anointed Son.

John's approach, therefore, is a reasoned approach. He's seeking to persuade. He's not trying to batter our emotions. He knows perfectly well that an emotional response may be briefly powerful

but will probably fizzle out quickly.

[10:22] But equally, he knows that if the mind is persuaded and convinced, then a person really can become a Christian and live a permanently changed life. What people need is solid conviction, not emotional fireworks.

So how does John go about this in our passage in chapter 19? Well, the answer is he shows us how the events that he's describing are fulfilling the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament.

His point is that the death of Jesus and various details about his death fulfill a number of prophecies in the Old Testament.

And the fact that they do so shows that the death of Jesus was not some random event. It wasn't some tragic accident of history. It was the supremely important thing that the one true God, the God of Israel, had planned since time immemorial.

And let me try and open this subject up a little bit. Just imagine that you were a Christian gospel preacher in the first century AD in about the year 35 or 40 or 45 AD.

[11:35] Now, where would you get the text for your sermon? There you are. You're a Christian. You want to preach. Where do you get your text? You're standing out in the marketplace or in the lecture hall or perhaps in the village square in a Judean village.

You're in Antioch or Caesarea. What are you holding in your hand as you preach your sermon? I've got my Bible, you see, open in front of me. That's typical Christian preaching today. But what would you have in your hand then?

You wouldn't have John's Gospel. It wasn't written until about 85 AD. You wouldn't have Matthew, Mark and Luke either. They didn't appear until about 60 AD. You wouldn't even have the Epistles of Paul.

The first one wasn't written until about 50 AD. So what you would have in your hand would be sections or excerpts from the Law of Moses, the Psalms and the Old Testament prophets.

There you are standing with your scrolls and you're expounding them. And your point is that these scriptures of the Hebrew Bible are prophecies of the coming of Christ. So your method would be to say to your audience, friends, I want to show you now from the Hebrew scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Christ.

[12:48] Let me just give you an example or two of this. First from the preaching of the Apostle Paul. There's no need to turn this up, but I'll read a few verses from Acts chapter 17 which records Paul's visit to Thessalonica.

At Thessalonica, Paul went into the synagogue, the Jewish synagogue, as was his custom. And on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead and saying, this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.

Christ. So Paul's method, and the year of his visit to Thessalonica would have been about 48 AD, his method was to take the Hebrew scriptures in his hand and expound to his audience, who would have been largely Jewish people, that the sufferings and resurrection of the Christ were all clearly foretold there.

And to cap it all, this Christ was no lesser person than Jesus of Nazareth. Now interestingly, this is exactly the method that Jesus himself used.

Remember those final words in Luke chapter 24, the final chapter of Luke's gospel, where Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, meets Cleopas and another disciple, possibly Mrs. Cleopas.

[14:06] And he says to them, as they discuss the events of Good Friday and they express their sense of grief and confusion about why Jesus should have been killed, he says to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart, to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Now that's the method that the early Christian preachers used following the example of Jesus himself. They would take the writings of Moses, the Old Testament prophets, and the Psalms, and they would show from them that Christianity was not a departure from the Old Testament, but the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

You could put that a bit more provocatively and say that Christianity today is not a departure from Judaism, it is the fulfilment of Judaism.

Judaism is the bud of which Christianity is the full flower, but it's the same tree. The good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus is the very thing that the Hebrew scriptures had been preparing the world for for many centuries.

[15:27] Now I know that Jesus is not named as such in the Old Testament, but the Old Testament is all about him. So come back with me to John chapter 19. This is what John, the evangelist, is interested in.

This is why he hardly mentions the violence of Good Friday, because his purpose is to show how the events of Good Friday have been predicted in the Old Testament.

And there are four points here in chapter 19 at which John quotes from the Old Testament, and I'd like us to look at these four points in turn. You'll see the first of them comes at verse 24.

The soldiers at this point have just crucified Jesus. He's up on the cross. He hasn't yet died. And of course, the soldiers have taken all his clothes off him. Decent clothes were valuable, so why waste them by leaving them on a man who was about to die?

And in any case, it was more humiliating for a man to be crucified naked. So they take his clothes. And the Roman soldiers, you see in verse 23, divide the spoils.

[16:33] Now there seem to have been five items of clothing, because John tells us that there were four items, one for each soldier. So there was a band of four soldiers. And these four items would probably have been the belt, a pair of sandals, a head covering or a cap, and then an outer big robe.

But there was a fifth item of clothing as well, the one called the tunic. And that apparently was a single garment that was worn next to the skin underneath the outer robe. Now five into four doesn't quite go.

So the four soldiers decided to cast lots for it. Let's not tear it, they say in verse 24, but we'll cast lots to see whose it shall be. And then John says, and isn't this at least a little bit surprising?

He says, this was to fulfil the scripture which says, they divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. And that quotation is lifted straight out of Psalm 22, the psalm which begins, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And then John rubs the point home in the final sentence of verse 24 where he says, so the soldiers did these things. I think there's something rather Scottish about that phrase, so the soldiers did these things.

[17:54] It's the word so. I first came to Scotland a few years ago to live here and just after we'd arrived it was summertime and I went to an agricultural show at Peebles. Some of you may have been to the Peebles show and I was in the poultry tent because I'm interested in poultry and I was talking to a young boy from Ayrshire who was also a poultry keeper.

We were looking at a particular bird in a cage and we looked at this cage and the young boy said to me, that's a very fine bird, so it is. Now that was a new phrase to me, I've heard it hundreds of times since, so it is.

It means, it is. It's asserting the fact, isn't it? We don't use that phrase down in England but it's there for emphasis north of the border. It's a dreiste, so it is.

You are a cantankerous old woman, Sarah, so you are. You'd never say that in your family, would you? Of course not. But it's the kind of thing that is said. So it is, so you are, so they are. So the soldiers did these things, so they did.

That's perhaps the force of it there. It means, of course they did because the psalm had to be fulfilled. Now that's Psalm 22, the whole psalm is the agonized outcry of a man in extreme suffering.

[19:07] My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That's the first verse and the psalm is a call for rescue which never comes. David writes the psalm and he says this, for dogs encompass me, a company of evildoers encircles me, they have pierced my hands and my feet, I can count all my bones, they stare and gloat over me, they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots.

Isn't that an extraordinary prophecy of the crucifixion? One thousand years before it happened. Who could have taught King David way back then to write they have pierced my hands and my feet?

Let's look on to the second place where John tells us the scripture is being fulfilled and this is in verse 28, a little bit beyond where we read but let's look at that, verse 28.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said, to fulfill the scripture, I thirst. Now the quotation here isn't taken quite word for word from any Old Testament text but what John has in mind is a very close parallel in another psalm, Psalm 69, again written by David.

Let me read two verses from Psalm 69 which are, again, it's a man who's in the extremes of suffering and he's suffering at the hands of evil oppressors. So here's the quotation.

[ 20 : 38 ] Reproaches have broken my heart so that I'm in despair. I looked for pity but there was none and for comforters but I found none. They gave me poison for food and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

Now the thing that links these two quotations from the Psalms together is not just their subject matter of extreme suffering but the fact that they were written by King David.

Now King David, as you know, was the Lord's anointed. He was the Messiah and God had told David through the prophet Nathan that there would always be a king of his family line to reign on the throne of Israel.

And here is Jesus, the king of David's line, the Lord's anointed, carrying out his kingly duties in this strange and terrible place, the cross of Golgotha.

There is the king. He really is the king of the Jews. Now John is saying to us as he quotes from these two Psalms, think of David, the great king of Israel Israel.

[ 21 : 46 ] And now look at the cross and you will see there the greatest king of Israel, the king of Israel who is king forever. Now our third quotation comes from verse 36.

Let me read that. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, not one of his bones will be broken. Now the original verses behind that quotation come twice in the law of Moses, in Exodus chapter 12 and Numbers chapter 9.

And both passages are describing how the Passover lamb is to be prepared and eaten. So for example, the verse in Exodus reads, the Passover shall be eaten in one house, you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house and you shall not break any of its bones.

A rather surprising regulation. In fact, a regulation which is not actually explained in either of its original contexts. In fact, we have to wait 1500 years for an explanation here in John chapter 19.

But John is telling us carefully in verses 31 to 33 here, you see that the Roman soldiers when they crucified Jesus didn't break his legs. The reason why a crucified criminal's legs were sometimes broken while he was still hanging on the cross was to hasten death.

[ 23 : 12 ] And the Jewish leaders were very concerned that it was the day before the Passover and the special Sabbath day and they didn't want Jesus and others hanging on the cross still alive on this special Passover Sabbath.

So they requested that the legs of these men should be broken. So they asked Pilate to have these legs broken but when the soldiers get there to Jesus they discover that he was already dead so they didn't have to break his bones.

Thus says John the scripture was fulfilled showing that Jesus is the Passover Lamb. The Passover Lamb capital P capital L for all time the Lamb who was slain as the book of Revelation describes him.

And then you'll see the fourth and last quotation comes in the very next verse verse 37 and again another scripture says they will look on him whom they have pierced.

Now the reference here takes us back to verse 34 and to the moment when one of the soldiers takes a spear and thrusts it into the side of Jesus while he's still hanging on the cross though Jesus was already dead at this point.

[ 24 : 21 ] And this time the quotation given to us in verse 37 is from the Old Testament prophet Zechariah and Zechariah chapter 12 it is and in that part of Zechariah's prophecy God himself is speaking about the future restoration of Jerusalem and of God's people and God himself says this I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy so that when they look on me on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child.

And do you see how God in that quotation identifies himself as the one who is pierced? When they look on me on him whom they have pierced so the one who is pierced is the one that God calls me.

Isn't that striking? So what is John saying to us in these four quotations? He is identifying Jesus through these four Old Testament passages.

That's what it's all about. In the two quotations from the Psalms John is telling us that Jesus is great David's greater son the Messiah of David's line who is the king of Israel forever and who shows the power and glory of his kingdom as he reigns from the cross.

Then the quotation about the bones not being broken identifies Jesus as God's Passover lamb the lamb slain to atone for the sins of the world. And then the quotation from Zechariah identifies Jesus as the representative of God himself who is pierced for the sake of the restoration of God's people.

[ 26 : 08 ] Now that is what John is interested in. Not the violence of the crucifixion horrible though that was. You see John is writing this all up 50 years later. The violence is long gone thank God.

John has had 50 years to come to terms with that. What remains however and is perpetually important is the identity of this one who is hanging on the cross.

If he's just another malefactor we can forget him. But if he is the son of David the Passover lamb and the pierced representative of God himself then we can never forget him.

Now just one more thing as we close. Here's a puzzle a riddle you might say. Which is the more important? the crucifixion of Jesus or the scriptures which prophesied it?

Now at one level of course the crucifixion of Jesus is the most important event in the history of the world. It's the place the only place where human sin has been dealt with and punished and forgiven.

[ 27 : 16 ] But these Old Testament scriptures were written down by Moses and David and the prophets for our comfort and our blessing and our assurance.

They tell us who Jesus is and more than that they tell us about the wonderful unstoppable of God's loving purpose. Back in Moses' day 1500 years before Christ God was preparing even then the Passover lamb whose bones were not to be broken.

In the 10th century BC when David was king God was preparing the everlasting king of David's line. And in the 6th century BC in Zechariah's day God was hinting that the one to be pierced was as close to him as a son is to his father.

And John is saying to all of us have the courage friends to believe your Hebrew Bible whether you're a Gentile or a Jew. You are dealing here with a God who is majestically working his purpose out and human life only finds its meaning and fulfilment in trusting this Jesus.

He is the only saviour. His death fulfills the purposes of God. Trust his death. Trust him. Because as John says these things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[ 28 : 47 ] let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. our gracious God we think of your Son pierced for us pierced for our transgressions lifted up on the cross bearing our sin and we thank you with all our hearts not only that he was prepared to come and do this terrible thing for our sake but that you too out of love for us were prepared to send him and we pray that you will graciously help all of us whoever we are whatever our position or our background to turn to him afresh in trust and through believing in him that we might have life in his name.

We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.