

John's Witness to the Power of the Cross

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: 31 March 2021

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] 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 fulfill 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.

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. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst. A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, it is finished. And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for that Sabbath was a high day, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness. His testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth, that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled. Not one of his bones will be broken. And again, another scripture says, they will look on him whom they have pierced.

John's witness to the power of the cross. Why did Jesus die on Good Friday? To many people, even those who admire the teachings of Jesus Christ, his death in his early 30s was just a purposeless tragedy. But if we listen to Jesus himself, then that simply cannot be so.

Jesus himself tells us, well in advance of his death, that it would be a purposeful triumph. For this purpose I have come to this hour, he said. To die as a grain of seed must die in the earth, in order to bear much fruit. And as we heard, read there in John chapter 12, he said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. And it would be, he said, a death to glorify the Father's name.

[3 : 42] A death to work ultimate judgment on all evil. And a death to bring eternal life to all who believe and trust in him. For this purpose I have come. And so for this purpose, John has written his gospel so that we might understand that purpose and share in its triumph.

John writes as a first-hand witness to give true and trustworthy testimony to us all. He saw, he heard, he touched Jesus Christ himself. And so he can tell us with authority everything that we need to know. At the very end of his gospel, in chapter 20, verse 30, he tells us that there's so much more that could be written, but these things are written, he says, so that you might believe that the Christ, that the Son of God, the long-promised Messiah is Jesus. And that by believing, you might have life in his name. It's a very great claim. Jesus is saying that in Jesus Christ alone lies the answer to the greatest human need, to the problem of our mortality, the problem of death.

That's something that we can't possibly have avoided over this past year. But actually, it's something that we can't avoid any year. Thankfully, there were just a few dozen died yesterday in our country from anything related to the coronavirus infection. But many hundreds died of cancer. Many hundreds more died of heart disease and strokes. Many hundreds died of other things. And that won't decrease. That curve won't go down, will it? Not ever. But Jesus said that he came to bring the promise of life. Not just an extra year or two of life, like medicines and vaccines may be able to do. But life everlasting. Eternal life. The life of heaven, which can be entered into now, even in this world. And begun now, through faith in Jesus Christ.

And so, you see, John's gospel is filled with evidence, with testimony of the coming of life into this world of death through Jesus Christ. And it's through the power of his death on the cross that we can know the promise of sharing in his resurrection life. For this purpose, I have come.

[6 : 19] And to bear witness to this is why John has written. Read John's gospel for yourself. Write through if you never have. You'll see that Jesus fills it with testimony in advance of what his death on the cross is to be about. If you've never read John's gospel, ask one of your Christian friends to read it with you. In fact, we've got a special edition that's meant for just exactly that. Reading it together. And you'll see all of Jesus' witness in advance to the meaning of the cross. But of course, John also records his own witness to the events of the cross. His personal testimony, both to those events, but also explaining to us what those events mean.

In the light of everything that Jesus himself had taught them beforehand. And again, after he rose from the dead. And I want to focus this Good Friday on that firsthand witness that John gives us. As we hear it firsthand of how and why Jesus died on the cross. Now, John, of course, wasn't alone at the cross. Chapter 19, verse 25 tells us that there were several other witnesses who saw it as well. All of these women. If you've ever been in court, you'll see that a good court lawyer or a good QC, they don't just want one witness. They want several witnesses corroborating each other, saying the same thing.

And so it is here. And as John says in verse 35, many of those who were reading his words written at first, they knew him. They knew he was trustworthy. They knew that he was telling the truth. He who saw it, he says, has borne witness and his testimony is true. It's like holding up your hand and saying, I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And John's doing that because it's such an important matter. Couldn't be more important. It's not just life and death. It's eternal life and death. So we must know that we're hearing the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ and about his death on the cross. Because for this very purpose, Jesus says he came. So what did John and these women, what did they witness in seeing how Jesus died and what he himself said on the cross and in the extraordinary events that surrounded his death on the cross?

Well, let me highlight three things that I think John makes a real point of highlighting for us in this chapter, in the way he's written his crucial account for us. Things that explain the message for us so that we will believe this testimony from honest witnesses. Witnesses like Mary and John and these others. First of all, John and the others witnessed a death that was foretold by the scriptures. God's scriptures consistently foretell it all. Jesus' death was the consistently revealed plan of God all through the Bible from the beginning. Any idea that the gospels witnessed a death that was an accident, that was a tragedy, that was just an unfortunate decision of Rome simply cannot be squared. Even just with this little portion of John's gospel, chapter 19. Never mind the rest of the New Testament. In fact, the whole of the Bible. Just look how often John explicitly tells us that the manner of Jesus' death fulfilled everything that had been foretold in the scripture. Verse 24, he says, this was to fulfill the scripture. Verse 28 again, this was to fulfill the scripture. Again, verse 36, that the scripture might be fulfilled. And he quotes another scripture there. It's unmistakable, it's explicit, unless we're utterly dull. And actually more than explicit, there are so many implicit things also that anybody who was reading this in the first century as a Jew, knowing the scriptures like the back of their hand like they all did, anyone would pick it up. Look at what we're told, for example, about the titulus, the inscription that was put on the cross by Pilate, proclaimed to the world in the three languages of the day, Aramaic, the local language, and Latin and Greek. Jesus, the King of the

[11 : 03] Jews. Of course, the first reason for putting that up there was just the usual one. I suppose Rome asserting her rule, making a statement to others, don't dare to oppose Rome, or this might happen to you.

And I think probably also it showed something of Pilate's contempt for the Jews and his revenge, really, on them for dragging him into something he found very discomfoting, sentencing Jesus. So that's why he won't change what's written when they ask him to. What's written is written. He wants to humiliate them.

But above all, of course, John is telling us that all of this serves the plan of God. That this true King would be proclaimed to the whole wide world, to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. I wonder if you noticed when we read part of John chapter 12 a little earlier. That's the time when Jesus comes into Jerusalem. And all the crowds are shouting, Hosanna. And immediately, we're told that some

Greeks, some Gentile, non-Jews, wanted to see Jesus. And it was then that Jesus said, the hour has come. The hour has come now for the Son of Man to be glorified. And I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. And here's Jesus lifted up now on the cross as King, proclaimed as King to the whole world. Israel's King, yes, but proclaimed to the Gentiles in their language. And the Psalms of the Old Testament are full of language like that.

Say among the nations, the Lord, he is King. Isaiah, the great prophet that Jesus quotes so often about his own ministry. He speaks of the coming Messiah as one, not only raising up Israel, but one who would be a light to the whole nations of the world. That my salvation, says the Lord, might reach to the very ends of the earth. And this is how that's going to happen, is what John is telling us here.

It's foretold by the scriptures constantly, consistently. He shall be high and lifted up, says Isaiah, and shall be exalted. And he shall sprinkle many nations. And yet it was the Lord's will to crush him when his soul made an offering for sin. I could go on and on and on. But you see, how for John, everything, everything about the death of Jesus was consistently foretold in the scriptures. Even, even to what happened with his clothes in verse 23, divided by his enemies, just as King David, his ancestor, who then in those days represented God's kingship to the world, just as he was gloated over by the enemies of God in his day.

[14:02] What we're seeing here is, is man's hatred, man's rejection of God's rule, which is, which is directed against everyone who has ever stood for God and for his way in this world. But it's coming to a climax in human beings, rejection of God in the person of God, the son, Jesus Christ.

That's why as you, as you read the Bible, as you read through the Old Testament, you'll find that all of God's saviors that he sent, all of his prophets, all his rescuers, his kings, his anointed ones, every one of them was opposed by those who cannot abide the rule of God over their lives.

So how then, when, remember like in Jesus' parable of the vineyard, when at last, the master sends his own son to face his rebellious subjects, how then is the reaction to him going to be any different?

It's all foretold in the scriptures. It's all in the consistently expressed plan and purpose of God.

It's not a mistake. It's not a failure. The apostle Peter, Peter is very clear about that, isn't he? On the day of Pentecost. You, he says to them, you crucified and killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men, but you did it only, he says, according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

[15:36] And again in Acts chapter 4, he says, yes, they were all gathered against Jesus, Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, all gathered against, but to do what your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Jesus died as foretold by scripture, according to the consistently revealed plan of God. His death was no tragic accident. God's scriptures consistently foretold it all.

And nor was Jesus' death in any way unwilling or resisted on his own part. What Mary and John and these others witnessed was a death willingly fulfilled by the Savior.

God's Son consciously fulfills it all. Jesus' death was the consciously expressed purpose of his own self.

Never mind all that Jesus told his disciples explicitly in advance, all through his ministry about the purpose of his coming death, and his desire to glorify the Father, to cast out the evil one, to give his life as a ransom for many.

[16:51] Never mind John's explicit words, as we said in John chapter 12, what Jesus said. He said all of this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. Never mind the huge weight of evidence that there is all the way through all of the Gospels.

Just these few verses here at the cross alone are enough to tell us that absolutely plainly. First, that Jesus acted himself in conscious fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Verse 28 says, Again, he's quoting from one of the Psalms, two of the Psalms, Psalm 22 and Psalm 68.

Psalms about the suffering of God's anointed King, consciously or in Jesus' mind, explicitly at that hour for everyone to hear. There's no question, none whatsoever.

This idea that Jesus is somehow being forced unwillingly or unwittingly into death, not by man, not by God the Father, against his will.

[18:04] No, he consciously himself purposes his death. One scholar puts it this way, Every part of Jesus' passion is not only in the Father's plan of redemption, but is a consequence of the Son's direct obedience to it.

It was his conscious purpose to fulfill the Scriptures, to accomplish that plan. Because that's what Jesus came to do. And now he knows that his work is done.

It is finished. It's fulfilled. It's accomplished. It's all the same word that's used there in this chapter in the Greek. It's the same word. The Scripture is fulfilled. It's finished.

Christ's salvation is fulfilled. It's finished. Jesus has consciously fulfilled the plan of God. And so now he consciously gives up his life.

He'd said before, I'm the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. No one takes it from me, he says. But I lay it down of my own accord.

[19 : 15] I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. And so now here, knowing that all was finished, that all was fulfilled, he said, it is finished.

And he bowed his head and he gave up his spirit consciously, purposefully. A death long promised, according to the consistently revealed plan of God in Scripture, and fulfilled, finished, according to the consciously expressed purpose of Christ the Son.

There's not a hint, is there, of a vengeful father, of an alienated son. No, there's just utter sovereign harmony in this act.

For this reason, Jesus said earlier, the father loves me. Because I laid on my life, then I may take it up again. And I do it, says Jesus, to open the door for my sheep.

I came that they might have life and that they might have it abundantly. For this purpose, I have come. Jesus spoke so often, so clearly, about what his purpose was, in coming to die for his people.

[20 : 37] And again, right here at the cross, in what Mary and John and these others witnessed, we see so clearly what Jesus' death accomplished, for God's plan, and for Christ's purpose.

And that was that this would be a death that frees through sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice completely frees us all.

And it was a clearly explained Passover for God's people. That's what John's message is here, so clearly, in this section of John chapter 19, where he brings the circumstances and the scriptures together with an unmistakable clarity that forces us, forces us to see that the cross is the great Passover of all Passovers.

It is the great redemption of all redemptions. And that this is the blood of the Passover lamb, the son of God himself. Why did John bother to record these verses telling us about the soldiers checking the crucified bodies, about the sword, the spear, piercing Jesus' side?

Well, of course, first of all, because he's determined to give an accurate testimony, and it really happened. He who saw it, he says, bore witness, and you know that he's telling the truth.

[22 : 01] And the details ring true, don't they? The Jews felt it was a disgrace, it was an anathema for bodies to remain visible on the Sabbath. It speaks of that in the law of Moses.

So, of course, John is bearing witness to what happened, really, and he's bearing witness to the fact that Jesus really was dead, that he had given his life up willingly, that he'd not struggled to hold on to it as these other two had.

That's why they had to have their legs broken to remove their resistance. But no, Jesus had given up his life. And Roman soldiers, let me tell you, they knew a dead man when they saw one.

And they certainly knew how to prove that someone was dead. Piercing the heart, piercing the lungs with a great thrust of the spear. It's just a ridiculous idea that Jesus somehow survived crucifixion and revived later on in the tomb.

Utterly impossible. But that's not all that John witnessed. That is, again, how he deliberately appeals to Scripture.

[23 : 07] He quotes from the law, from Numbers chapter 9, and he quotes from the prophets, from Zechariah chapter 12. Why? Well, look, he's reminding us that all of this is happening during the Passover.

It was the day of preparation in Passover week, the great day. And that was no accident. Because John, like the other gospel writers, insists that that was deliberate.

In John 12, verse 1, we're told that Jesus deliberately, six days before the Passover, turned towards Jerusalem. And in chapter 13, we're told again, just before the Passover, Jesus knew that now his hour had come to depart out of this world.

And the meal in the upper room, everything, including John's own explicit testimony, everything tells us that his death is a fulfillment, is the reality of everything that all the symbolism of the Passover

promised would one day at last be accomplished for this world.

When just as God redeemed his people out of the bondage, out of the slavery of Egypt, and saved his people from the destroying angel of God's judgment, when they took refuge under the blood of the Passover lamb, that just like that, so at last, he would redeem all his people forever from the bondage of sin, from the curse of death, through the blood of the Passover lamb, whose shed blood would be a shelter for all who shelter under it from God's judgment on sin, and will be the door to liberation and to life.

[25 : 00] What did John the Baptist say right back at the beginning when he introduced Jesus to the world, behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?

And what did the apostle John and Mary Magdalene and these others, what did they witness right here at the cross? That Jesus was that Passover lamb, that he fulfilled the scripture.

And verse 36 is a quote directly about the Passover lamb from the book of Numbers, that it should be spotless, that it should be perfect. They shall leave none of it till morning, neither break any of its bones.

You see, Jesus' death was a Passover to free his people from the bondage of their sins through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

And that's the testimony of John at the cross. It's the testimony of the whole New Testament. Paul says to the Corinthians, Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.

[26 : 06] Peter says, you were ransomed not with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish. Friends, if one thing can be said unequivocally, about how the gospel writers of the New Testament viewed the death of Jesus, it was that they understood from the scriptures, from the incessant teaching of Jesus himself, that it was a Passover, that it was a redemption, that it was a freeing from sin and from death through sacrifice, through the blood of the Lamb of God.

This is my blood of the covenant, said Jesus, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. And Matthew records Jesus saying that, giving his disciples to drink that cup of forgiveness and then he immediately goes to Gethsemane where he speaks about drinking the cup of the wrath of God for the sins of human beings.

The great exchange so that his people might go free. It is the great Passover. John here notes that the detail of the blood and the water, blood probably mingled with fluid from the lung cavity.

And it can't help but make us recall Jesus' words back in John chapter 6 about his blood cleansing from sin and his words about the living water that would flow from him but would become a fountain of everlasting life to all who believe in him.

And he quotes here at the cross from the prophet Zechariah prophesying about the great mourning that there would be one day in Jerusalem and they realize that in piercing this man they put a sword of hatred through the heart of God himself.

[28 : 07] But the prophet there immediately after that quote about piercing him goes on to say and on that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

Why did Jesus come on Good Friday? What's the truth about the Christian message? Well the unequivocal answer of the Christian faith of the gospels of the apostles of the whole Old Testament and of Jesus himself?

Well it's summed up in the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthian church the gospel I preach to you which you received and which you stand and by which you are being saved is that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

John says it was a death foretold by the scriptures that consistently revealed plan of God. It was a death fulfilled willingly by the savior consciously expressed as the purpose of Christ and it was a death that frees through sacrifice that clearly explained as the great Passover for God's people and that's why and only because it was a death to fulfill God's purpose in that way that's why this terrible terrible Friday dark Friday awful Friday that's why we can call it today good Friday good and wonderful and full of blessing because and only because it was a death for sin and it was a death for sinners only because

John's testimony is true in his witness to this the power of the cross of Jesus Christ cursed he hangs upon a tree full atonement can it be blood and water give the sign cleansing sacrifice divine his the wrath the mercy mine friends I for one am so so glad eternally glad for what John and Mary and these others witnessed that day at Golgotha and for their words that bring their witness their

testimony to us about what they came to know about the power of the cross of our Lord Jesus
Christ religious