

A Great Cry - Expounding Jesus' Work for His Own on the Cross

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[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 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, women, 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 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 has received the sour wine, he said, it is finished. And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was a 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, he 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.

[2 : 52] Do keep those words open in front of you in the orders of service. And we're going to have a look at this together now. It is finished. Three simple words. We have them on the front of our Easter cards this year. Jesus' great cry from the cross. In fact, his last words before he gave up his spirit, as John records them for us. But what does that mean, if anything? Why did Jesus die on the cross?

No doubt there will be some so-called experts discussing that matter this Easter on various media platforms and so on. And I expect they'll give all kinds of different answers.

And we live now, don't we, in the age of the expert. Experts tell us what to think. And more and more, it seems experts are telling us what we're allowed to think and what we're not allowed to think. But all kinds of things from history to biology to medicine and others.

It's no longer trust the evidence, it's trust the experts. And the experts, it seems, don't even need any evidence any longer. In fact, it seems to me that on lots of issues, evidence is far better if it's silenced, if it's cancelled, if it's censored, lest it should get in the way of such expert opinion, expert pronouncements. That's how we can have conclusions, such as men can have babies.

Or that people voting in elections is actually dangerous to our democracy. I've heard experts saying that of late. Or just one more jab will definitely stop you getting COVID.

[4 : 37] Or all kinds of other things that fly absolutely in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. Such as the idea, in fact, that Jesus Christ's death on Calvary was a purposeless tragedy.

Many people think that. Cut short the life of a wonderful man whose life's work was tragically less than otherwise it could have been. But you see, the Bible will not allow all the so-called experts or indeed anybody else to ignore the plain reality, the plain evidence. Real evidence from real witnesses. And the Bible calls us to examine the evidence, not to trust experts, but trust reliable,

verifiable evidence as witnessed by real people, known people, and above all as testified to by the scriptures and by Jesus himself well in advance of his cross.

So you see, real Christian faith is the very opposite of a kind of leap into the dark, mindlessly swallowing the line of some expert in contradistinction to what you actually see in terms of evidence. Christian faith does not think that you are incapable of rational thought and judgment and looking at evidence yourself. Demands that you are.

Real Christian faith is a step into the light, the light of reality, not fantasy, the light of truth. True truth, not just your truth and my truth, not just truth that is in your mind, but nobody else in the world can see, but something that is based on what has been seen and has been heard and has been touched by many, many others. That's what the apostle John, who wrote this gospel, describes. The testimony of himself, the testimony of other apostles. We've seen it with our own eyes, he says. He wrote years later, after the gospel, about everything concerning Jesus' life and his ministry.

[6 : 50] And he said, we testify to it. It is real. And we proclaim to you its reality and its meaning. It was anything but a purposeless tragedy. It was in every way imaginable a purposeful triumph.

And John says, if you trust in that sound evidence, you will find it leads you to life. We testify to it, he said. And we proclaim to you the eternal life made manifest to us through Jesus Christ, through what he accomplished on the cross at Calvary.

That's what all this is about. It's about life. It's about real life. Not the truncated, the vitiated shadow of life, of what we know as life in this broken world, the world under the curse.

No, from our birth, our mortal bodies are heading to the grave, aren't they? Heading back to the dust and ashes. But life that Jesus is talking about, that John is presenting to us, is quite different. It's life with abundance. Life where death is actually overcome forever. Eternal life. That's what John is talking about right from the beginning of his gospel, right to its end.

[8 : 12] In him, he says, in the eternal Son of God was life. And this life was the light of man. And he came, says John, to bring life.

The life of God himself to invade, to overturn the darkness of a world of death. And on the cross, through his own death, that life-bringing work was accomplished.

It is accomplished. It's finished. Jesus' own final words on the cross testify to that finished work. And he was, in those words, expounding the meaning of his death.

And John the evangelist understood that. And in writing his account of the cross, the way he did, he is elucidating it for us, so that we will be in no doubt at all about what Jesus' death really means, and what it accomplished.

So I want this Friday evening to focus on what John wants us to grasp about these final words of Jesus, and what they declare about the final work of Jesus, and the finished work on the cross.

[9 : 25] First of all, the final words of Jesus proclaim the great denouement of Scripture. John is showing us that what the Scriptures consistently foretold, the Son of God consciously fulfilled.

All through their accounts, the Gospel writers are at pains to point out how everything about Jesus and his ministry was foretold by the Scriptures from the very beginning. And here it's so clear that that's what John wants us to be in no doubt about.

Look at verse 24. This was to fulfill the Scripture. Verse 28, to fulfill the Scripture. Again, verse 36, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

And verse 37, again, another Scripture says. Everything was consistently foretold by Scripture, even down to what happened to Jesus' clothes.

The quote there in verse 24 is from Psalm 22, the psalm that begins, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And we know Jesus also uttered that cry on the cross because the other Gospel writers record it for us.

[10 : 37] John doesn't focus on that, but his readers knew the psalm, and they understood its significance. It was the experience of David, God's anointed king, who represented on this earth the rule of God.

And that was why he was always opposed and hated by so many people who hate God. And Jesus, you see, was the ultimate expression of that rule of God on this earth.

And he was the recipient, therefore, of the ultimate hatred of that rule. And he knew that. And he consciously accepted that rule.

That's the significance of his thirst and the sour wine that's mentioned there in verse 29. Again, that alludes to another psalm, Psalm 69, which again speaks of God's king on earth, bearing the

reproach of those who hate God.

The reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me, cried David. They give me poison for food, and for my thirst they give me sour wine to drink, to show that contempt.

[11:43] If you read the Old Testament story, you'll find that consistently, the reality is that all God's saviors that he sent to bless the world, all of them are scorned and rejected.

His prophets, his leaders, his kings. And ultimately, of course, so it was for the ultimate king, the son of God, Jesus. Peter, the apostle, declared later on the day of Pentecost, you crucified and killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men.

But he says, you did it only according to the definite plan and the foreknowledge of God. And what was consciously foretold by the scriptures, Jesus consciously fulfilled.

Look at verse 28 there. Jesus knowing, knowing that all was now finished, fulfilled, and to fulfill the scripture. The same word.

He said, I thirst. And he said in verse 30, it is finished, it is fulfilled. You could translate it, Jesus knowing that all was now accomplished, and to accomplish the scripture, said, it is accomplished.

[13:04] It was his conscious purpose. To fulfill the scripture, to accomplish God's plan. And now, he knows that work is done. Finished.

Fulfilled. Accomplished. And for this, he consciously gave up his life. Verse 30, he gave up his spirit.

Back in John chapter 10, he had said, I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down.

But I lay it down of my own accord. And for this reason, the father loves me, said Jesus. Because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. And I do it, says Jesus, to open the door for my sheep. So that if anyone enters by me, he will be saved. I came, he said, that they might have life and have it abundantly. He came for his sheep that they might have life, abundant life, eternal life.

[14:11] Now Jesus spoke so often and so clearly in advance about the purpose of his coming death. For this purpose, I have come to this hour, he said, just before the events of Easter unfolded.

I've come, he said, to be like a grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies in order to bear much fruit. But what was that fruit and what does it mean that Jesus laid down his life for his sheep?

Well, Jesus and John also makes it just as clear. This great denouement of scripture is all about the final accomplishment of a great deliverance from sin.

And that's the second thing that Jesus' final words tell us. That his finished work accomplished that great deliverance from sin. And John is showing us that what sin so calamitously ruined, the Son of God himself completely restored on the cross through his death for our sins.

that's why all the focus immediately after Jesus' final words, you see, it's on his dead body on the cross. Verses 31 to 37.

[15:33] And you see, especially at the heart of that, the thing that John draws particular attention to, the thing that he swears he has witnessed and that his witness is true in verse 35.

What is it? Look at verse 34. From the dead body of Jesus, when pierced by the soldier's spear, at once there came out blood and water.

Blood and water. Why is that so important for John to swear that he witnessed truthfully? Well, yes, of course, it is clear evidence that Jesus really was dead.

You can read all kinds of medical accounts of these things to show that just these details ring very true. If the heart and the lungs are pierced by a sword, you'll have blood coming out. You'll also have fluid from the lungs, from the pleural cavity.

But John's not a doctor. His interest isn't really in those kind of details. In any case, there wasn't any doubt. Was there in the soldier's mind that Jesus was already dead? These soldiers had plenty of experience of crucifixions.

[16:36] They knew a dead body when they saw one. But the idea that Jesus wasn't dead really on the cross is absolutely preposterous. Because that is what Muslims believe.

Jesus somehow survived, that he revived, that he then escaped out of a sealed tomb having been flogged, having been crucified on the cross.

I find it very hard to see how any intelligent person could believe that really. Jesus certainly was dead. died. But John is bearing witness not just to that, something far, far more important than just the fact of Jesus' death.

He is showing us what Jesus himself was telling us about what his death accomplished. And it's all summed up in those two things, the water and the blood, about what they represent. the water, the pouring out of the spirit of life and the blood, the piercing of the slain lamb of God. [17 : 47] The water speaks about the spirit of life. It speaks about eternal life restored at last to human beings through the cleansing of the life-giving fountain that is opened at the cross of Calvary.

All through John's gospel, if you read it, there's a great focus on water. We heard some of it in the readings. And it's always associated with the spirit of God and the life of God.

Right back in chapter 1, John the Baptist declares that he baptizes only with water, but there's coming one, Jesus, who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, the spirit of life. Chapter 2, the very first great sign of Jesus was to demonstrate the utter transformation that the new life of his kingdom brings, turning water into wine.

In chapter 3, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus, the Jewish synagogue ruler, and tells him that the only way into the kingdom of God is to be born anew, born of water and spirit.

In chapter 4, he speaks to the Samaritan woman by the well about living water, water that he alone can give, which he says to anyone who drinks it will be in them, a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

[19 : 04] In chapter 7, on the greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which involved a symbolic pouring out of great jars of water from the pool of Siloam, while people chanted the words of Isaiah the prophet, God is my salvation.

With joy, you draw water from the wells of salvation. And it was then, in the midst of all of that, that Jesus stood up and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture says, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. And John said, he said this about the spirit whom those who believed were to receive.

But that couldn't happen yet because Jesus had not been glorified. But now, on the cross, in Jesus' death, immediately, at once, is flowing water.

And it's no accident that in verse 37 there, do you see, John says that also fulfills the scripture. And this time, he's quoting from the prophet Zechariah about a promised day when God's people would mourn what they had done to the person of God himself.

[20 : 26] On that day, God says through Zechariah, I will pour out a spirit of grace and please for mercy so that when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they will mourn for him.

And he goes on, as John knew that his readers knew very well, on that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

And they will call upon my name and I will answer them and I will say they are my people and they will say the Lord is my God. On that day, living water shall flow out of Jerusalem and the Lord will be king over the earth.

you see a fountain of living waters poured out to the world from the cross of Jesus. The spirit of life poured out the gift of eternal life as promised, as foretold in the scriptures and as promised there so many times so wonderfully on the lips of Jesus himself and now it's fulfilled, it's accomplished. but how? Well, notice, not without and not in any way separate from the blood.

[21 : 53] Blood and water. The spirit of life comes only through the slain lamb. The fountain of life is opened only as the death bearing lamb is pierced.

And that too fulfills the scripture so clearly, so evidently and that's the significance of the quote there in verse 36. It comes from Exodus 12 and from Numbers 9 it speaks about the Passover lamb.

If you read back in John's gospel you'll see how deliberately he tells us again and again just like the other gospel writers do that the Passover was approaching. Jesus came deliberately to Jerusalem just before the Passover.

John 13 verse 1 we're told that that's how he knew that his hour had now come for him to depart out of this world loving his people to the utmost.

And just in case we'd forgotten John reminds us again here look at verse 31 it was he says the day of preparation that was the great day of the Passover feast. And everything is screaming fulfillment.

[23 : 05] this at last is the great Passover the great deliverance the great rescue for God's people not not just from an earthly Egypt but from a bondage far far greater from our bondage to sin to death and to hell itself because he Jesus the son of God is the lamb slain whose blood alone like

the blood of the Passover lamb in Egypt could turn aside the wrath the judgment of God could accomplish the great deliverance bringing life everlasting as promised to God's people.

Right at the very beginning of Jesus ministry John the Baptist pointed to him and said behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and here at the cross John the evangelist and Mary and all these other witnesses mentioned what they saw was that indeed Jesus was the unblemished lamb not one of his bones was broken as the scripture demanded the lamb of God slain so that the life of God's spirit might well up and flow out as a cleansing fountain bringing life to a world of death bringing light into the darkness of our world the darkness of the human heart at once there came out blood and water on that day said the prophet there shall be a fountain open to cleanse them from their sins and uncleanness on that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem Jesus finished work accomplished that great deliverance from sin so that what sin so calamitously ruined human life as God created it to be as a never ending joy as fellowship in his presence sharing his life rejoicing in his image all that so calamitously ruined by our sin has been completely restored by the son of God but not without the shed blood of the lamb of God John is adamant about that here just as he's adamant years later when he wrote to Christians some of whom it seemed were wanting to talk up endlessly the life and the spirit but talk down the lamb slain never says John not by the water only but by the water and the blood he said it's the blood of Jesus that cleanses from all sin and later still when John was a very old man imprisoned on the island of Patmos for his faith he he received that great revelation that we have in the last book of the Bible a revelation of the risen Lord and his eternal kingdom and still he is just as adamant he Jesus has freed us from our sins by his blood by his blood and he says of the risen lamb in glory for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and he sees countless numbers of these doesn't he in his vision saved out of the great tribulation of earthly life under the curse in this realm of death and now they're spotless they're white because they're washed he says in the blood of the lamb the cleansing water of life everlasting that flows only only from the blood of the lamb only from the cross of Jesus and that's why you see for John the cross is the supreme revelation of the glory of God the glory of God made known in earth and heaven forever and ever do you remember how John said that when Jesus spoke about these rivers of living water flowing out he said it couldn't yet be because Jesus was not yet glorified and yet here so clearly he says that now on the cross that fountain is opened in the moment of Jesus death you see Jesus glorification that he's talking about isn't his resurrection it isn't his ascension we might think that but that is not John's view it's not Jesus view the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified cried

[28 : 14] Jesus as he faced his coming betrayer now father glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed when John sees the vision of the glory of the risen Lord that fills heaven the lion of Judah the root of David the one who has conquered sitting on the throne in the heart of heaven what is that glory he sees that fills heaven and that all creation bows down before him to worship what is that most glorious magnificent sight in all time and eternity well John tells us I saw a lamb standing as though it had been slain the vision of the ultimate glorification of Jesus the son of God the king of heaven ground crowned with glory and honor it was the glory of the cross the lamb slain that's the glory that filled heaven after

Jesus resurrection that fills heaven now that will fill heaven forever and ever that's the glory that the son had with the father even before this world existed it was the glory of the slain lamb the lamb slain as revelation 13 verse 8 says before even the foundation of the world in the eternal counsels of the triune God John saw that vision of glory in his vision on the island of Patmos but he saw it first that day in the cross of Jesus we have seen his glory he declares in the opening words of his gospel glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth no one has ever seen God he says but the one and only himself God who is at the father's side he has made him known on the cross the cross of Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation revealing to the world forever the God whose glory is the very antithesis of all our human conceptions of power and glory with man power and glory corrupts and absolute power and glory corrupts absolutely but with God this God his glory loves and gives and absolute glory loves and gives absolutely on the eve of his crucifixion Jesus prayed father

I desire that they may see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world I have made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known do you want to know the truth about the nature of deity about the true God the maker of heaven and

earth the ruler of this universe the judge who will judge all men do you want to know the height and the heart of his glory of his power of his omnipotence of his might well John says you see it on the cross and you hear it in that great cry it is finished accomplished now is the son of man glorified and God is glorified in him glorified in him as the fountain of living water is opened to the world the life of God poured out to human beings that could only come through the lamb of God the living water only through the lamb's blood this is the message of Easter this is the gospel of Jesus Christ and so says John to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom priests to his God and father to him the glory and dominion forever and ever amen