

The Great Rescue (this world redeemed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ)

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome everybody to our Good Friday service today here at the Tron. To those of you who are here upstairs and also to those downstairs listening by translation into Farsi, welcome to our service.

We begin reading in Luke's Gospel at chapter 22. There came a crowd and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them.

He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike them with the sword?

And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, no more of this. And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and the officers of the temple and the elders who had come out against them, Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs?

When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness. Then they seized Jesus and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house.

[1 : 17] And Peter was following at a distance. When they'd kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, This man also was with him.

But he denied it, saying, Woman, I don't know him. A little later, someone else saw him and said, You also are one of them. But Peter said, Man, I'm not. After an interval of about an hour, still another insisted, saying, Certainly this man was also with him, for he too is a Galilean.

But Peter said, Man, I do not know what you're talking about. And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.

And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he'd said to him, Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times. And he went out and wept bitterly. Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him.

They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, Prophecy, who is it that struck you? They said many other things against him, blaspheming him. When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes, and they led him away to their counsel.

[2 : 41] They said, If you're the Christ, tell us. But he said to them, If I tell you, you will not believe. And if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

So they all said, Are you the Son of God then? And he said to him, You say that I am. Then they said, What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.

Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We find this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

Pilate asked him, Are you the king of the Jews? And he answered him, You have said so. Then Pilate said to the chief priests of the crowds, I find no guilt in this man.

But they were urgent, saying, He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea from Galilee even to this place. When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.

[3 : 48] And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him.

So he questioned him at some length. But Jesus made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod, with his soldiers, treated him with contempt and mocked him.

Then arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day.

For before this, they had been at enmity with each other. Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people and said to them, You all brought me this man as one who was misleading the people.

Now, after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man was guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us.

[4 : 57] Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him. But they all cried out together, Away with this man, and released to us Barabbas, a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection, started in the city and for murder.

Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus. But they kept shouting, Crucify! Crucify him! A third time, he said to them, Why?

What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him. But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified.

And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked.

But he delivered Jesus over to their will. Amen. May God bless to us this, his word.

[6 : 18] People have all sorts of confused ideas about the meaning, or the lack of meaning, of the crucifixion of Jesus. But the Bible is absolutely crystal clear.

As Luke quotes Peter, saying on the day of Pentecost in his sermon, Jesus, he says, was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

Yes, he was killed by the hands of lawless men. As the church clearly acknowledges again in Acts chapter 4. Herod, Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, these men did what God had planned and predestined to take place.

And that plan was, as Luke again records the father of John the Baptist saying, it was to give the knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.

And that salvation comes as the whole New Testament bears witness to it. Indeed, the whole Bible bears witness to it. It comes in the great exchange. Whereby Jesus, the perfect son of God, became the perfect substitute in his life and in his death.

[7 : 34] That he might win a complete salvation for all that he'll call his own. And that's why the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 5, By the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous.

He is perfectly faithful where we are pitifully fallen. But not only that, he who is perfect in sinlessness also bears the penalty for our sinfulness.

So that as the Apostle Peter says, Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

And so the hymn sums it all up in two lines. My Savior's obedience and blood hide all my transgressions from view.

In his glorious life and in his guiltless death, Jesus Christ is the perfect substitute. And therefore he is the great Savior.

[8 : 38] And the only Savior. Our great sin in the cross finds a great substitution through the definite plan and purpose of God.

From before all time. That he himself in the person of his Son should be shown to be the great Savior of men. And that's the uniform testimony of the Christian scriptures.

And so we shouldn't be surprised when we read Luke's gospel and Luke's story of the cross. The story of dreadful betrayal and trial and the death of Jesus.

We shouldn't be surprised that he tells that story in just such a way as to show us vividly, dramatically, unmistakably what it all means.

He is teaching us the meaning of the cross. And that's what these verses show us. They show us the great exposure of human sin at the cross.

[9 : 44] But they also show us the great exchange of divine grace. Because of the tender mercy of our God who is our great Redeemer. So look first with me at the great sin of man that is exposed at the cross of Jesus.

Luke paints for us a terrible picture of what sin against God really is in all its ugliness. It's like a negative rainbow, if you like. Just as a rainbow breaks white light into all its constituent colors.

So here Luke exposes every ugly and hideous shade of dark. That makes up the utter blackness of human sin. Look first at verses 54 to 62.

Where we see in the story of Peter and Judas, perhaps the darkest and the ugliest picture of all, sin as desertion of God. All the disciples abandoned Jesus in his hour of need.

All the other gospels make that clear. But Luke focuses just on Judas and on Peter. But everyone deserts Jesus in a dreadful act of perverse disloyalty.

[10 : 55] And that of course is the very heart of sin against God. It's desertion from a deeply loving and personal relationship with a loving and giving God.

With the God who gave us life itself. But whom we scorn so callously. In an act of unspeakable unfaithfulness.

That's the overriding image in the Bible for sin. It's spiritual adultery. It's unfaithfulness. Turning to whores. Away from a faithful lover and spouse.

And that's the aspect of sin I think that shows up the deep, deep ugliness. Of what a personal assault human sin is upon the person of God. Upon the heart of God himself.

That's the nature of adultery, isn't it? That's the bitter reality. It's the deepest, dearest human bond that we know. And it's treated with callous contempt. And the wound that that act inflicts is so deep.

[11 : 59] It's so personal. Sometimes it's impossible ever to assuage. Isn't that right? And that's what we see so vividly here. In Judas and indeed in Peter also.

Because really there's very little difference between the two of them. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. Peter betrays him with a curse. Although Luke is a little kinder than the other gospel writers.

He doesn't record Peter actually swearing as the others do. But it's such a frightening thing, isn't it? To realize that Judas was part of Jesus' inner circle for three years.

And all the time he must have known what was in his heart. Was Judas in mind when Jesus told the parable of the sower? And spoke about those whose love and devotion was choked by their desire for riches and pleasures in life.

And these things lead them to become deserters of Jesus. Maybe. I think it's Peter's denial perhaps that's even more sobering for us.

[13 : 03] Because he was a great one. He was a natural leader. He was a gifted man. And yet in a way it was his greatness that made his collapse so great. But both men and indeed every one of the disciples.

They so callously desert the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the very essence of sin. Every time you and I take the easy way out and don't stand with Jesus.

We desert him. We say I don't know him. We say to hell with him. Every time we put the cares of life, the pleasures of life, of this world before our interest in him.

We betray him. However pious our talk might be. It's the very worst hypocrisy and sham, isn't it? Pretending friendship. But practicing treachery.

I looked up Judas in my thesaurus. Here's what it said. Two-timer. Traitor. Traitor. Deceiver. Deserter.

[14 : 08] That's what sin is. Callous desertion. Of the giver of life himself. The second shade of darkness we see in verses 63 to 65.

I think on the screens there. Sin is defiance of God. These coarse henchmen of the religious leaders. They show the sheer ferocity. The bitter hatred of Jesus that is there.

They're in the human heart. As they mock him. As they beat him. As they blaspheme him. Coarse men behaving in a bestial way. So gratuitously against Jesus. It's extraordinary today, isn't it?

Still the rage that is so often unleashed against even the very name of Jesus Christ. Even by people who don't even believe in his existence. Why is it that people always want to swear using the name of Jesus Christ?

Why is there such rage among so many people at the very thought that the name of Jesus should be heard even in a school lesson, for example? Or that words of Jesus should be on billboards in a public place.

[15 : 13] Why such rage among people in our society who want every single reference to God expunged from every place in public life? Like the National Secular Society campaigned to do.

Why? Well, because there is an element of sheer defiance at the very heart of human sin. Rebellion. Rage.

At the very notion that anyone should dare to rule me or my life. And it lashes out at the very thought of it with fury.

Lashes out at anyone who dares to speak for God. Who does demand the rule over us. And above all, when Jesus himself in the person of God incarnate confronts them head on.

And that rage is evident. And that's why people rage irrationally against Jesus. Because sin is defiance. And as verses 66 and following show so clearly, sin is also dishonesty.

[16 : 18] There's a great self-deception, corruption in those who refuse the truth about Jesus Christ. A question that the scribes and the Pharisees ask Jesus is about his identity.

That's what they say at least in verse 67. If you're the Christ, then tell us. But these men have seen enough and heard enough from Jesus to have all the evidence anyone could ever possibly need to trust that Jesus is who he says he is.

They don't want to know the truth. They don't want to be persuaded of the truth. And Jesus knows that fine well. In verse 67, he says, If I tell you, you won't believe. And nor will they respond if he pleads with them.

So he won't. Because their minds are closed. It's followers of Jesus today often who are called close-minded and bigoted.

But in my experience, you know, so many people simply refuse to consider the claims of Jesus. They will not even consider the truth because, well, I can only put it down to sheer prejudice.

[17 : 24] They will not engage. So they just latch on to all sorts of straw men in order to dismiss these arguments without thinking. Well, that was the Jewish council here right in front of us.

It was utterly dishonest. They have one purpose in mind, and that is to condemn Jesus. They don't care about the truth. The truth doesn't get a look in. Well, sin, says the apostle Paul, is corrupt and dishonest at its very heart.

It turns the truth of God into a lie. And when you exchange the truth for lies at the very heart of your being, after time, you can't tell the difference between truth and lies anymore.

It's a very frightening thing to see people for whom dishonesty and deception has become so deep-rooted in their thinking that they begin to even deceive themselves. Then look at chapter 23 and see how in Pontius Pilate we see sin as duplicity.

They can't get Jesus crucified, executed for blasphemy. That's just a religious matter. So they have to go to Pilate and accuse him of something else. And they accuse him of treason, of leading a rebellion against Caesar.

[18 : 38] Well, Pilate would have to come down very hard on that. We know from the history books he certainly did at times. His livelihood as governor in Rome depended upon it. But verse 4 is clear.

Immediately, Pilate saw this was a load of nonsense. I find no guilt in this man, he said. And that should have been the end of it. But, of course, Pilate was a politician. My goodness, this week we learn how politicians deal with one another.

He's out for his own promotion. He's out for his own popularity. So Pilate, verse 7, passes the buck to Herod. But when Herod sends him back, verse 15, also with a very clear not guilty verdict, well, he repeats his own verdict.

Nothing deserving death has been done by this man. And yet, he caves in completely like a total coward to the will of the people. He doesn't want to harm his career.

Doesn't want to affect his popularity. Certainly not overdoing the right thing by Jesus Christ. Well, again, that's a common story, isn't it? So many people have seen the truth about Jesus quite clearly and convincingly.

[19 : 47] And yet, the cost, the cost is far too high to stand publicly with Jesus. It costs popularity.

It costs acceptance. It may cost advancement. And so, like Pilate, they give verbal assent to Jesus. But in reality, they just act to distance themselves.

And so, in truth, it takes sides against him. The duplicity of sin leads to such cowardice and such compromise, even in the face of such a clear understanding of the truth.

And that, again, is a great warning to us, isn't it? To those who do know the truth, but whose eyes are so often more on their standing in this world than their need to stand with Jesus.

Don't let the duplicity and the double-mindedness of sin make you a coward like Pilate was. Don't let your career goals ruin your spiritual future or that of your family.

[20 : 51] Sin is so duplicitous. And then in Herod, of course, we see sin as derision, derision for God, how contemptuous he is towards Jesus, verse 11.

Here's a man who just trivializes spiritual things. We're told in verse 8 he was glad to meet Jesus, but he's just such a shallow man. Religion for Herod was all about spectacle, all about entertainment.

Show me something impressive, Jesus. That's what he says. And when Jesus denies him that, he shows his true color. It's nothing but contempt and derision. And he and his men mock him and deride him because Jesus won't dance to his tune.

And there's a deep arrogance of contempt and derision at the very heart of human sin, which so inflates the human ego to be the center of all things and elevates the merely mortal above God so that any concept of God that we might have is all about him being there to serve us, not the other way around.

We show utter contempt for any other idea, an idea that would dethrone us, that dethrones our ego from being center stage in our lives.

[22 : 09] And so if Jesus won't dance to our tune, if Jesus won't give us the answers that we want, if he won't affirm the behavior that we want to have, well, we show him nothing but contempt. We hold him in derision like Herod.

Herod had a great opportunity, by the way. He was sent by God a personal envoy of the gospel in the person of John the Baptist. But John dared to challenge Herod's sin and his lifestyle, in particular his sexual life.

And Herod wasn't having that, so he beheaded John. He rejected God's merciful word of grace and truth to him with utter derision. And now when Jesus stands before him, the Lord will not cast his pearls before swine.

He's silent. He gave no answer. You see, friends, you cannot toy with the real Jesus Christ, the real God of heaven made known on this earth. If you want to engage with him seriously, in the end he will withdraw.

And he will withdraw always from an attitude of contempt and derision towards his truth and his grace. You see how many shades of human sin are exposed right here at the cross of Jesus Christ?

[23 : 30] And it culminates finally in verses 18 to 25, you see, with sin as demand, as the collective demand of all the people to destroy and banish the very presence of God from this earth altogether.

Verse 18, they all cried out together, away with this man. Verse 21, crucify him. Verse 23, demanding with loud voices that he be crucified.

Give us violent murderers. Give us rebel fighters. Give us anyone and anything but away with God incarnate. Seems quite astonishing, doesn't it, when we see it in front of us here?

But of course the cross simply exposes the great sin of man, which from the beginning of the world right until this present day wants the banishment of God, wants the creator put out of his world, wants the interference that he has with our lives to stop so that we can assert our will and be autonomous and rule our own lives.

And so the collective demand of mankind is seen here in verse 25. Their will is the destruction and the death of God in the person of his son.

[24 : 49] Jesus in Gethsemane, remember, prayed, not my will but thine. But here's man shouting to God, not your will but ours. The great sin of man that's exposed so vividly in all its terrible shades of blasphemous horror in the entire representative mass of humanity around the cross of Jesus.

Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews as Luke gathered together against God's holy servant Jesus, asserting their dark, ugly, sinful human will.

And yet, said Peter, doing what God's will and God's plan had predestined to take place.

How can that be so? Well, because Luke's story here tells not only of great sin but also of great substitution, the great substitution of the Savior affected at the cross.

I want you to see two things that Luke focuses our attention on here very particularly in his account of Jesus' arrest and his deliverance around the cross. First of all, think of the significance of these two trials of Jesus.

[26 : 06] He's tried under the Jewish council, religious trial, and he's tried under the secular power of Pilate and Herod. Why do these two trials have to take place? Surely the authorities could quite easily have just assassinated Jesus quietly without any of this fuss.

not by drones in those days but by daggers. Why didn't they do that? Well, because, as Jesus himself said, even as his betrayer was about to come to him, the Son of Man goes as it has been determined by God's sovereign plan and purpose.

And God purposed that there should be these courtrooms on earth to reflect, if you like, the courtroom in heaven and where Jesus Christ is seen to be on trial in the place of sinful man.

In our place condemned, he stood upon charges of blasphemy and treason. Huge significance in that.

Blasphemy was the charge of the Jewish council. Verse 70, he was claiming a unique place with God and the unique power of God. Because the irony is that it's they who are truly blaspheming God because they're denying God himself manifest in the flesh and they're truly scorning the only gospel of God.

[27 : 30] That's the highest blasphemy of all. But that's their charge against him. He is blasphemously usurping the place of God. But of course, they need more than that for a trial against Rome and for a death sentence.

So they go to Pilate with a different charge. This one, it's treason. Rebellion against the king's rule. He's pretending to be a king himself. He's forbidding tribute to Caesar. Well again, that was utterly false just a little while before.

Luke records us Jesus saying the opposite. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's. Submit to Caesar's rule. And Pilate saw it was all false and says so. But it's the accusers who are pushing back against the rule of Rome and the judgment of Rome.

Verse 5, they're pressing on him. They're the real rebels against Rome's authority, not Jesus. But you see, Jesus stands accused of in this earthly court blasphemy and treason.

And that is exactly what mankind stands accused of before God in the court of highest heaven. Blasphemy. Ever since Eden, man has sought to usurp God's place.

[28 : 37] You shall be as gods, said the serpent. Man has sought to be God ever since. And treason, rebellion against the rule of God, rejecting his way, going our own way, singing, I'll do it my way from the cradle to the grave.

That's what human beings do. But here, as man is the incarnate son of God, and in our place condemned, he stood. And that also explains the silence of Jesus in front of his accusers.

He makes no defense. As the prophet Isaiah foresaw, like a lamb led to the slaughter, he is silent. He opened not his mouth. Because he chose to be our substitute.

He purposefully bore our sins in his body on the tree. Not only offering his perfect life of faithfulness for us, offering God what we could never be, a life of full submission to him.

Not my will, but thine. But also, a perfect sacrifice to bear the guilt of what we should not be, but every one of us is, a blasphemous, treasonous rebel who has deserted God so callously.

[29 : 51] He's treated him with derision and defiance and duplicity and utter dishonesty and disowned him and demanded his destruction. Do you see how clearly Luke is showing us this great substitution effected at the cross by homing in on these trials?

Well, if you're not yet quite convinced, just zoom in then on this last paragraph, verses 18 to 25, where he turns our eyes from the two trials to the two prisoners that we see at the cross.

Because you see, it's so carefully ordered and planned in God's great purpose that at the cross, he even gives us a dramatic acting out of this great exchange of sin for salvation.

Even as the events unfold, he shows it to us to shout aloud, look, look at what the Savior came to do for sinful human beings. Look at this vivid illustration of the great substitution of the cross that we see in these two prisoners, Barabbas and Jesus.

Three times we're told by Pilate that Jesus is utterly innocent in verse 4 and then again in verse 15 and now again here in verse 22. I have found in him no guilt.

[31 : 04] Three times, though, they shout him down. Away with him, verse 18. Crucify him, verse 21. Again, verse 23. All are against him and they cry out, rather, for a man called Barabbas and we're told twice in verses 19 and 25 that he was justly imprisoned.

He was awaiting death for insurrection and for murder, for treasonous rebellion, just as Jesus is accused of, and for murder, which the Bible always considers a terrible and a blasphemous crime, indeed, against the very image of God.

That's why murder always carried the death penalty in the law of Moses because a crime against God's image is a crime against God himself. It's blasphemy. And the united, settled will of all the people, verse 25, is to substitute the blasphemous, treasonous guilt of Barabbas for the holiness and true deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But remember Peter's words later at Pentecost? Remember Jesus' own words in Gethsemane? It's not man's will, but it's God's will that's being fulfilled in all this.

And his will, which Jesus embraces to the very end, is to substitute the innocent for the guilty, the righteous for the unrighteous. And so all the human actors collude with the will of Satan to destroy the perfect image of God in man.

[32 : 34] That's been his relentless purpose since the beginning of time and it comes to its climax in the assault on Jesus. And yet it was God's unassailable purpose that the very action which will bring about the great exposure of human sin in all its darkness and ugliness as they seek to crucify the Son of God, that that very action brings about the great exchange of divine grace.

As Christ suffered the innocent for the guilty, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God. so that a substitution that man meant for evil, God meant for good and for the saving of many lives.

A great substitution. The great exchange pictured so vividly even on that very day in Barabbas, a guilty, vile, and helpless sinner condemned to death and Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God.

Full atonement, can it be? Yes! Because Jesus was faithful even unto death to drink the cup of God's eternal wrath against sin in our place and to offer to God the beauty of obedient trust in his Father in our place.

the great substitution effected at the cross of Calvary through which God accomplished the great rescue and the world was redeemed through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[34 : 21] Well, you may ask, well, what's that got to do with me? I wasn't there. It's nothing to do with me in my life. I'm not involved in all of that. You see, friends, the Bible says that is just not so.

The old Negro spiritual is absolutely right with its question when it says, were you there when they crucified my Lord? And the answer that the Bible gives for every human being in this world is yes, we were all there.

Because this scene around the cross exposes the truth about every single human heart and the sin that pervades this whole wide world. And the truth is, it was our sin that put him there.

Your sin and mine also. We're all involved in the death of Jesus, whether we like it or not. Because at the cross is where all history is focused.

And it's at the cross where all eternity is decided for every human being who's ever walked this earth. The writer Michael Wilcock is very right when he says that two plans converge at Calvary.

[35 : 34] The plan of the will of lawless men to crucify Jesus and the plan of the definite foreknowledge of God. But the difference between them, he says, is all important.

And men must choose whose side they will be on. Either beneficiaries of the plan by which God brought Jesus to the cross or accomplices in the plan by which Satan brought him there.

Or as C.S. Lewis puts it, you will certainly carry out God's purposes however you act. But it makes all the difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John.

all the difference for all eternity. But friends, if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ this Good Friday, can there be anything more wonderfully assuring than to know that he was and is and ever shall be your great substitute?

All that you have never been and can never be, he is for you. and all that you have been and all that you still are all that shames you he bore away for you.

[36 : 57] That's the great rescue that we find at the cross of Jesus Christ. It's true we cannot trust ourselves not one of us even the closest to Jesus we're all betrayers at heart whether it's through the wickedness of a Judas or whether it's through the weakness of a Peter.

We cannot trust ourselves but we can trust the Lord Jesus. He didn't betray his father.

He didn't betray or abandon his calling as the savior for all his true friends. He did not fail any whom he came to save.

and he will never ever ever fail you if he's your redeemer your savior and lord.

Amen. Let's pray. Our gracious God how the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ shames us lays us in the dust as we see exposed there before our eyes the sin of our own hearts in all its multifaceted darkness and horror.

[38 : 18] But how the cross of our savior also thrills us and reassures us and gives us hope and life and light.

So teach us Lord its meaning that cross uplifted high and draw us to kneel at the foot of your cross this day and every day in thanksgiving and glad rejoicing in our great redeemer the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.