

The Power of the Evil Cross

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[0 : 00] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not! anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of man. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about Him, and cried out, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me. For from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only begotten one who is God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

He came through Him, and the world was given through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, but of the blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Majestic words from the prologue to John's Gospel. The light of the world, the life of men come into our world, and yet even His own people didn't receive Him. Why?

[3 : 09] Well, because as John goes on to say, people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

And that is the sad story of the whole human race from the very beginning. And so, John, in his Gospel, tells us of how the ultimate revelation of the glory of God in our world, in the person of God the Son, it revealed also the ultimate rejection of that glory on the cross, on that first Good Friday. we intersperse our readings with a sung meditation on John's message of the eternal Word made flesh, sung to the late Thomas Swanson's lovely tune, Alt-Charn.

Born We're eternal God and Lord, Name thy highest heaven adored, Maker of the starry sky, Ruling nations from on high, Bearing flesh to us draws nigh.

Light of life is glory shown, Down the ages dark and long, Now reveals all truth and grace, Here we glimpse the Father's face, Still rejected by his grace.

[5 : 32] For God so loved the world, That he gave his only Son, That whoever believes in him should not perish, But have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, But in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, But whoever does not believe is condemned already, Because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, And people loved the darkness rather than the light, Because their works were evil.

Jesus said, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, And whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him Will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him Will become in him a spring of water Welling up to eternal life.

[6 : 50] If anyone thirsts, Let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, As the scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

Now this he said about the Spirit, Whom those who believed in him were to receive, For as yet the Spirit had not been given, Because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Come to Israel's chosen few, Long prepared of God they knew, They whose promise was his law Once with Moses' glory so Now from deity we draw But he had cast on the lake Hear with joy the

promised name

Find in him true bread and wine Holding grace in word and sign Born anew by breath divine The Pharisees said to one another Look, the world has gone after him Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks So they came to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee And asked him Sir, we wish to see Jesus Philip went and told Andrew Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus And Jesus answered them The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified

Truly, truly I say to you Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies It remains alone But if it dies It bears much fruit Now is my soul troubled And what shall I say?

[9 : 44] Father, save me from this hour But for this purpose I have come to this hour Father, glorify your name Then a voice came from heaven I have glorified it And I will glorify it again The crowd that stood there and heard it Say that it had thundered Others said An angel has spoken to him Jesus answered This voice has come for your sake Not mine Now is the judgment of this world Now will the ruler of this world be cast out And I, when I am lifted up from the earth Will draw all people to myself He said this to show by what kind of death He was going to die Now is the judgment of the world, says Jesus

Because rejection of God deserves judgment And yet John tells us that Jesus came as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world And that's why Jesus was so troubled Because he knew that only through his coming death Would there be that saving fruit Only if the seed dies Does it bear much fruit I, he says When I am lifted up Will draw all people to myself What small have thou else for lost

Where's he now that he teaches That all men to him might fly To our Savior lifted high Now the precious seed must die Cruel men in darkest night Bind and boost the prince of light Hail him to a cross of shame So the beauty of his name Lamb of God for this he came

Now Judas, who betrayed him Knew the place For Jesus often met there with his disciples So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers And some officers from the chief priests And the Pharisees Went there with lanterns and torches and weapons Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him Came forward and said to them Whom do you seek?

They answered him Jesus of Nazareth Jesus said to them I am he Judas, who betrayed him Was standing with them Then Simon Peter, having a sword Drew it and struck the high priest's servant And cut off his right ear The servant's name was Malchus So Jesus said to Peter Put your sword into its teeth Shall I not drink the cup That the Father has given me?

[13 : 50] So the band of soldiers And their captain And the officers of the Jews Arrested Jesus and bound him First they led him to Annas For he was the father-in-law of Cepheus Who was high priest that year It was Cepheus who had advised the Jews That it would be expedient That one man should die for the people Now Simon Peter was standing And warming himself So they said to him You are not one of his disciples Are you?

He denied it and said I am not One of the servants of the high priest A relative of the man Whose ear Peter had cut off Asked Did I not see you in the garden with him?

Peter again denied it And at once a cock crowed So they took Jesus And he went out Bearing his own cross To the place They called The place of the skull Which in Aramaic Is called Golgotha There they crucified him And with him Two others One on either side And Jesus between them 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 Oh teach me Lord It's meaning That cross uplifted high Poor Simon Peter It took a long time And it took much bitter sorrow Before he came to understand truly The power of the evil cross And certainly On that first Good Friday The thought of Jesus' blood Was painful It was repugnant To him Peter was very hostile To any talk about Jesus' death And famously Do you remember Jesus had to rebuke him He said Get behind me Satan When Jesus talked about those things And Peter was so disgusted And as we read just now He was He was full of bravado that night Pulling out his sword To cut off the ear Of the high priest's servant And yet as we also heard When the real crunch came He fell so shamefully Just as Jesus had predicted And the cock crowed That next moment The leader of the pack The leader of Christ's disciples But humiliated So dreadfully And it's worth noting In the passing isn't it That the gospel doesn't airbrush That out of the story It doesn't try to protect Peter's reputation The Bible doesn't hide The reality about human

beings But of course Things did change dramatically For Peter after the resurrection Mark records in his gospel The wonderful words of the angel With the bemused women At the empty tomb He's not here He said He's risen And the wonderful addition Go and tell his disciples And Peter That he's going before you To Galilee And there you'll see him Just as he told you And Peter Even Peter The great denier The great denier Is to be restored And of course

[17 : 40] John records At the end of his gospel Doesn't he The words of restoration For Peter On the lakeshore When Jesus said to him Follow me Go and feed my sheep Become A fearless apostle A preacher of Christ No longer Ashamed of the cross But proclaiming The power of the cross No longer Resisting But rejoicing Indeed In the shed blood Of the Lord Jesus Christ And many years later It was this same Peter Who wrote To suffering Christians On the edge of the Roman Empire To encourage them That they are He says God's elect They're chosen He says For obedience And sprinkling With the blood The precious blood Of Jesus Christ Because Peter Had witnessed The resurrection Of Jesus First hand And now he did Understand

At last The meaning Of that cross Uplifted high He knew That as the old hymn says There is power There is wonder Working power In the precious blood Of the Lamb So this Easter I want us to To listen To Peter The preacher As he himself Teaches us The real power Of that evil cross And we're going to Focus on some of the Places in his first letter Where he speaks So clearly About the death Of Jesus Christ And what it's achieved Already For this world And for its people And What it promises For the future To give us Sure and certain hope For eternity And so this Good Friday I want us to consider These two texts That are there In your program Where Peter explains The power of God At work Through the evil of man At work on the cross To achieve things For his beloved ones To bring them Ultimate rescue From the calamity Of the human condition And indeed To bring ultimate Restoration For a whole world That is so sick Just because Of the curse Of human sinfulness And the first text there Is 1 Peter 1 Verses 18 and 19 You'll see it In the program there Where Peter tells us That the precious blood Of Jesus Christ Has power to rescue That is On Good Friday Jesus himself Became The precious sacrifice That alone Can bring ultimate rescue To mankind Peter says You were ransomed From the futile ways Inherited from your forefathers Not with perishable things Such as silver and gold But with the precious blood Of Christ Like that of a lamb Without blemish Or spot Now Peter's language there

Would be very familiar Indeed To anybody Who knew the Old Testament Because it's the language Of the book of Exodus Where Moses Remember Tells us That God's people Were redeemed They were ransomed Out of the bondage Of slavery In Egypt And they were ransomed By a great act Of God's judgment And his mercy You might remember The story The ten plagues And the tenth And most awful Of those plagues Was that God Was going to send To every household In Egypt A destroying angel And the firstborn In every single household Would perish Because of God's anger Except Except The homes That took shelter Under the blood Of the Passover lamb A lamb Without blemish Or spot Whose blood Was daubed On the doorposts And on the lintels To turn away The wrath Of God's judgment And instead To open the door To liberation For God's people Rescue Out of the bondage Of Egyptian slavery And into The land of God's promise And so Peter's message Is so very clear Jesus himself Is the precious sacrifice He brings rescue Into that true freedom Out of the total futility Of life without God Only Jesus' blood Only his death On the cross Can liberate us Says Peter From what he says The futile ways Inherited From our forefathers There's something Ironic I think In his words Because For many people In our country Today They think True liberation Is liberation From God They think That the The futile ways Of our fathers Are the ways

[22 : 43] Of the church The ways of Christianity And now In our generation Well we've been Wonderfully liberated From all that old hat Those were the bad Old days But now we're Wonderfully sophisticated People Modern people And we've abandoned Those futile ways Those far off days Of restrictive bondage From God's commands On people's lives So we're free now But of course There's absolutely Nothing at all Modern Or new About that attitude Because Humanity From the very beginning Thought that they'd be Liberated If we threw off God's yoke You only need to get To the third chapter Of the Bible The book of Genesis To read about that It's hardly a 21st century idea To think you'll be free By abandoning God And the consequences Of that folly Unfold ever after Through the Bible If you read on From Genesis chapter 3

You'll see very clearly Where it leads It doesn't lead to liberty And happiness For human beings It leads to bondage To disillusion To despair And decay And to death Of course We all want freedom

But according to the Bible When you reject The God who made you You don't find freedom What you experience instead Is what Peter here says Futility Life isn't just Magically beautiful And bountiful When you abandon God In that way The truth is Lies bitterness And brokenness And bondage Think about a Think about a football Field I mean Most football players I think Generally when they're Playing a game Wish the referee Would just disappear He's got right pain In the neck Because he spoils Everything He obviously hates them You would think that Wouldn't you The abuse that they Hurl his way That certainly Seems to be their view I don't know Who'd want to have The job of a football Referee Everybody hates them The players The managers And all the fans But just imagine For a moment If the referees Did disappear Think about the next Old firm game Would it be suddenly A magically beautiful game I don't really need To answer that Do I Or maybe You're a bit more Highbrow Your thing Is going to hear The Royal Scottish National Orchestra At the concert hall A little bit more Gentile perhaps Than Parkhead Or Ibrox I suspect But I imagine That musicians In an orchestra Do get a bit fed up With the conductor From time to time Mutter under their breath About that pompous Prima Donna With the baton Making us endlessly Repeat things Because of his obsession With the score And getting it right Why doesn't he just Disappear Why doesn't he just Let us artists Express ourselves freely Well would that be The result If the conductor Of the orchestra Magically just Disappeared Would we have The magnificent Beautiful music Of a Beethoven Or a Bach I don't think so Very quickly We know Don't we It would turn Into an incoherent Cacophony Of noise Unrecognizable And unbearable The very thing That comes out Of the speakers In your teenager's Bedroom by the way As I'm sure You've probably noticed Without the referee Without the conductor In their proper place There won't be order Will there? There'll be chaos There won't be beauty There'll just be Brokenness There'll just be Discord And disaster Well let me ask You the question What do you think Our world Most closely resembles? [26 : 52] Is it the joy Of music being played In beautiful harmony? Of artists Working together In synergy For a common goal Of something really beautiful?

Or Does our world Look a bit more like A cacophony Of discordant noise? Everyone playing Their own tune Their own way Thinking that's freedom But just demonstrating Utter futility Well Christ's apostle Peter Is pretty clear Every human being He says Has inherited futility By nature Vain Pointless Empty lives Now we don't want To believe that Of course we don't How could we? It's a devastating Outlook on life Isn't it? So we try to pretend That that is not so And we like to think That we are free But friends Peter's message And Jesus' own message Is that we're not free That we're slaves To futility Because Jesus says We are slaves To sin And when Jesus Says sin there He doesn't just mean Minor Or even major Peccadilloes Like being friends With Jeffrey Epstein Or something like that No He means sin As a mighty power A power that grips Every human being Like a vice And explains Our deep Rooted behavior And we don't like That kind of language Either do we?

We don't like it But we recognize The reality We even Use euphemisms For it We call it Human nature It's human nature We see To explain When people go wrong Sometimes even Very great wrongs When it's ourselves Especially We might say Well It's human nature We're trying to say Well it's just natural Yes I've had an affair And been unfaithful To my spouse But I'm only human It's human nature It's natural It's natural For a man To want to sleep around It's not my fault It's natural Is that freedom?

Or is it futility? In a sense Sewage is natural Isn't it? But it sure Makes the world stink And I'm afraid Human nature Is only natural In that way It's a fact Of human life Yes it is But my goodness What a stink It's caused In our world That's the truth According to the Bible We are in bondage Says Jesus To the power of sin And that's why Human society Is marked out Not by beauty And true freedom But by the bitterness Of total futility We are not free We are in bondage And that's the great irony Having rejected God We've actually filled our lives With idols With gods of our own making That we devote our lives to

[30 : 20] Seeking the freedom That we crave But actually In practice Serving these masters Slavishly As individuals Bowing down To the altars Of fashion Or fitness Or learning Or earning Pursuing health And wealth And work And love And on and on it goes Or pursuing power And land And resources And energy As nations But do these things Really liberate us?

Well the dissatisfaction The discord The depression The despair All around us It hardly suggests so Does it? And certainly None of these things Can liberate us From the one Unavoidable master That

has an iron grip On all of our lives As one artist Put it very starkly The constant struggle Against annihilation And death Is absolutely Stupefying In its terror It renders Anyone's Accomplishments Meaningless Futile And that is the condition That the apostle Peter Here The apostle of Christ Says we all inherit From our race And a survey Of our world today Not least The killing fields Of Ukraine The chaos In the Middle East Very hard to deny

Isn't it? The futility And folly Is abundant And tragic But friends The message Of Good Friday Is that the cross Of Jesus Christ Has power To rescue And to redeem Because the Son of God Himself Became the ransom The precious sacrifice That alone Can bring Ultimate rescue To our world And to human beings Rescue From total futility Into true freedom And a freedom And that is forever And you see That's because Secondly In 1 Peter 2 Verse 24 The second text there Peter tells us That the precious Blood of Christ Has power To bring Restoration That is that On Good Friday Jesus The Son of God Became The permanent Sin bearer Who alone Can bring Ultimate restoration To mankind And therefore To the whole world Just look at that verse

He himself Says Peter Bore our sins In his body On the tree That we might Die to sin And live to righteousness By his wounds You have been healed You see Jesus The permanent Sin bearer Brings the restoration The complete Healing From the cursed Hopelessness Of sin He takes All That is wrong Sin And he makes It right He restores Righteousness Rightness You might say Peter's clearly Not talking about Physical healing Here It's not medical Matters It's spiritual Sickness He's concerned With He's quoting The Old Testament Prophets again He's quoting Isaiah Who foretold That in the coming Saviour And the servant Of the Lord He will be one Who suffers To bear the sins Of his people You might recognize

The words If you Are a concert hall Person And you listen To Handel's Messiah He has Bore in our griefs And carried Our sorrows He was wounded For our Transgression Says Isaiah Our rebellion Against God's Righteous rule He was crushed For our Iniquities The deep Unfaithfulness That ruins Our relationship With God And with His wounds We Are healed Doesn't our World need Healing Deep And radical And lasting Healing Something way Beyond anything That governments Or the United Nations Or the World Health Organization Or any of the Rest can ever Ever do Indeed so often Actually it's These very bodies

[35 : 01] That inflict Such great Horror On the people Of the world Just look at The news Around us This Easter Violence And war In the Middle East And in Ukraine Disharmony In so many Nations Not least our Own Utter distrust In public Life And in public Institutions But none of That is new All of these Things are just The symptoms Of the same Chronic disease That has Eaten away At humanity Like a vicious Cancer All throughout Human history Isaiah the prophet Was talking about Exactly the same Things Three thousand Years ago Nearly Violence And exploitation Of the innocent Corruption In public Life Loss of trust In law And in its Enforcement No one Goes to law Honestly He said They rely

On empty Pleas They speak Lies They conceive Mischief They give Birth To iniquity He's not Talking there About the Release of The Epstein Files Or things About Peter Mandelson Things about Our former Prince Not talking About the Machinations Of Westminster Or Holy Read He's talking About God's Own land In 800 BC They could Be talking About Britain Today Because the Foundational Problems Of human Beings Are still Exactly the Same Our nature Is damaged It's all Wrong It's diseased It needs Healing It needs Radical Healing And friends The Bible Tells us Exactly why That is Listen to Isaiah Your Iniquities Have made A separation Between you And your God And your Sins Your sins

Have hidden His face From you So that He does Not hear And that's The root Of the Problem That's why Our world Has gone So wrong In so Many ways And our Lives Along with It And that Foundational Rupture Between Humankind And God Our creator Is what The Bible Calls Sin And inevitably When the Most basic When the Most fundamental Relationship in Human life Ruptures Well There's going To be a Whole lot Of tragedy Ensues That's what Happens Isn't it When a In a Family A fundamental Relationship A marriage Partnership Breaks Down It can't Help but Cause pain And anguish In the Family In the Extended Family Maybe even In a Whole Community Relationship Rupture Always leads To misery Misery

Personally Misery Within Communities Misery Within Nations Misery Between Nations And wars And civil Wars It's all Around us In the World Right now And that's The primary Disease you See The deep Pathology That affects All humanity According to The Bible All that we See in the World All that we Experience In our Personal World All that's Wrong is Just symptomatic Of that Deep

pathology Deep In the Human Condition Everything Is wrong Not right With our Human hearts That's the Issue And nothing On this Earth Friends You know Nothing on This earth Could cure The evil Of the Human heart Isaiah Said God Looked And saw
And there Was no Man No one To intercede For humanity's Sickness No one To bring Healing And then Said the Prophet God's own Arm Brought Salvation He put on Righteousness As a breastplate And a helmet Of salvation On his head God himself Would come He says To bring That healing That none Other Could bring And Peter Is saying To us That is What he Did In the Person Of Jesus Christ His son Not to Treat merely The symptoms Alone But to Deal with That vicious Cancer itself At the Source And permanently Bearing away The sin Of helpless Human beings He himself Bore our Sin In his Body On the Tree Says Peter He was Cursed For us He bore The penalty
[40 : 05] Of sin That our Sin might Be borne Away Forever And ever So that He says He might Make all Things right Look there At verse 14 That we Might die To sin Depart From From that Whole world Gone wrong And live He says For righteousness Everything Everything Being made Right Again Everything Right In our Humanity Forever By his Wounds You have Been Healed The The Precious Blood Of Christ Shed On the Cross Peter Is Saying Has Power Power To bring That Restoration From that Cursed Hopelessness Of sin Into Complete Healing Of God's Righteousness A world Renewed Made Right Forever The world Isaiah Himself Forsaw

And predicted Where he Said the Desert Shall bloom Like the Rose And rejoice With joy Where the Years of the Death Will be Unstopped When the Eyes of The Blind Will be Opened Where all Sorrow And all Sighing Will flee Away That was The world That the Apostle John Saw In his Wonderful Vision That God Gave him Imprisoned On the Island Of Patmos Where every Tear He said Will be Wiped Away And death Itself Will be No more And that Day has Not yet Fully Dawned Of course Peter's Quite clear About that In the First Chapter Of his Letter It Awaits He says The Revelation Of Christ's Glory When he Comes Peter's Gospel Is no False Gospel Claiming Spiriously All sorts Of things Today That are Not yet Today But he Is just As clear That it Is a Living Hope A certain Hope Because Jesus

Rose From the Dead And therefore We have An unshakable Certain Hope Of complete Healing Of body And of Soul And of Society Of our Whole Human World Because At the Cross In the Cross Of Jesus There Was Power To bring Entire Ultimate Restoration To this Whole Sin Sick World One of The Great Ancient Hymns Of the Church About the Cross Has this Verse Here's The Nails The Spear The Spitting Reed And Vinegar And Gaul From His Patient Body Pierced Blood And Water Streaming Fall Earth And Seas And Stars And Mankind By that Stream Are Cleansed All All And Forever Friends On that

Day The First Good Friday At The Cross At The Place Of Man's Most Terrible Evil The Power Of God Was Revealed For A Glorious Everlasting Salvation Salvation Through God's Son Who Became The Precious Sacrifice Which Alone Could Bring That Ultimate Rescue To Humankind From The Bondage Of Sin Bondage To The Power Of Sin To The Futility Of Sin He Became The Permanent Sin Bearer Who Alone Would Bring Ultimate Restoration To Our Whole World By Healing The Sickness Of Sin Which Has So Cursed Our World There Was Power There Was Wonder Working Power In The Precious Blood Of The Lamb That's Peter's Message And There Is Still Power There's Power Today Power

To Rescue Power To Restore Even Desperate Failures Deniers Deserters As Peter Himself Had Been And All The Disciples Were Around The Cross The Power Of God That Turned The Sinful Wickedness Of The Cross Into The Saving Wonder For All Who Believe Friends Here's The Truth Of The Christian Gospel We Can Know That Power You Can Experience That Power Today Today Just as Peter did When he Met the risen Lord Jesus And He Found Himself Ransomed Healed Restored Forgiven And Singing For The Rest Of His Life The Praise Of Him Who Died Of Him Who Died Upon The Cross There

[45 : 09] Is No One In This Room This Evening Who Cannot Experience And Know That Power That Forgiveness That Restoration Whatever You Have Done And Wherever You Have Been You Just Have To Ask Him And Trust Him And It Will Be So For You It Surely Will And You Also Will Join The Joy Of Those Who Know That They Stand Forgiven Forgiven At The Cross Of Jesus Christ Amen To Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
[48 : 16] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let us pray.
Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.
[51 : 41] Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen.