What the Cross Reveals

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[0:00] Ordinarily, I would ask you to turn with me in your Bible to a particular passage, but! not tonight. Tonight, I'll ask you to simply listen as I read. And I have two reasons for! The first is that it's Good Friday. Not only that, but in a few minutes we will share the Lord's Supper together. And I believe now more than ever, we are called to linger at the cross of Christ. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper the night before His death, He told His disciples, do this in remembrance of Me, specifically His broken body and His shed blood on the cross. The Apostle Paul would later add, for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. As much as a part of me would love to skip ahead in the story to that Sunday morning when Jesus rose again from the dead, He very specifically tells us to remember that Friday before when He hung on the cross.

In fact, we are to remember that day over and over again until, as Paul says, He comes again. So if you will, allow me to read for you what happened on that day as you simply allow yourself to be immersed in the story. And the second reason I won't ask you to follow along with me is that I can't, at least not easily. You see, I'd like to read from all four gospel accounts simultaneously.
I'll actually be reading from a harmony of the crucifixion that I compiled several years ago. This takes all four accounts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and brings them together in one unified narrative. So you'll hear every detail provided by all four gospel accounts. And I'll pick up the story following Jesus' various trials throughout that early Friday morning, beginning with Governor Pilate's final decision to let the Jewish leaders crucify Him. So listen as I read.
Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate decided that the Jews' demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus over to their will to be crucified. So they took Jesus, stripped Him of His purple cloak, and put His own clothes on Him. And they led Him of His purple cloak, and they led Him of His purple cloak. And they led Him of His So they took Jesus, bearing His own cross. And as they led Him away, they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry His cross.
They laid on Him the cross to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed Him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for Him. But turning to them, Jesus said, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.
[3:26] For behold, the days are coming when they will say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, cover us. For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with Him. And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, they offered Him wine to drink mixed with gall. But when He tasted it, He would not drink it. And it was the third hour when they crucified Him and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left, and Jesus between them. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Pilate also wrote an inscription of the charge against Him and put it on the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.
So the chief priest of the Jews said to Pilate, do not write the King of the Jews, but rather this man said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, what I have written, I have written.
When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His garments and divided them into four parts, each part for each soldier, or 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

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among them, and for my clothing, they cast lots. So the soldiers did these things. Then they sat down and kept watch over Him there, and the people stood by watching. And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.
So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked Him to one another, saying, He saved others. He cannot save Himself. Let Him save Himself if He is the Christ of God, His chosen one. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. He trusts in God. Let God deliver Him now if He desires Him. For He said, I am the Son of God.
[6:27] The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him sour wine and saying, If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself. And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way. One of the criminals who was hanged railed at Him, saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other rebuked Him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. 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. When the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lima shabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, He is calling Elijah.
After this, Jesus, knowing all that was now finished, said, To fulfill the scripture, I thirst. A jar full of sour wine stood there, so someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and held it to his mouth to drink. But the others said, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. When Jesus had received the sour wine, He cried out again, again with a loud voice, It is finished. And he bowed his head, and calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. And having said this, he breathed his last and gave up his spirit. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he praised God, saying, Certainly this man was innocent.
And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split, the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, Truly, this was the Son of God. And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home, beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances, and the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger, and of Joses and Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.
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.
[11:39] Now, having read the full account of the Lord's crucifixion, I want to draw our attention to three things that stand out to me in what took place that day. And the first of those is the sinfulness of man. Now, to be clear, I don't mean that there were merely sinners present on that day.

Of course, that is true. But what I really mean is that the depravity of the human heart was on full display. Just consider the people who were gathered around Jesus and what they did and what

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they said.
First, there were the Roman soldiers. They mocked him. They stripped him. They nailed him to the cross. They robbed him of his clothes and divided them among themselves. So as Jesus was hanging on the cross, suffering terribly, they were gambling for his tunic.
Then there were the religious leaders, the chief priests, the scribes, the elders. If anyone should have recognized who Jesus was, it should have been them. They knew the law of God.
They knew the prophets. They knew all of the promises of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. And yet, when they stood before the cross, they did not weep for the Lord of Lords. No, they demanded his crucifixion. And then they sneered at him, saying he saved others. He cannot save himself.
[13:20] Do you hear the irony of that? In a very subtle way, they were proclaiming the gospel as they mocked him. He saved others. He saved others. He cannot save himself. And that is true, though not in the way that they meant it.

He could not save himself because he was saving others. He had the power to save himself, but he would not save himself so that he might, as was said at his birth, save his people from their sins.
And then you have all of the people who were passing by that day. We're told that they had assembled for this spectacle. They were not Roman soldiers or religious leaders.
They had no reason to be there, except maybe their curiosity got the best of them. And yet, they joined in that chorus of scorn. They wagged their heads.
They yelled insults. On the surface, they had no reason to despise him. But they quickly joined with everyone else in mocking him all the same. Even the criminals.
[14:31] The criminals who themselves were being crucified, who were hanging next to him, they joined in the mockery. As one of them eventually confessed, they deserved their punishment.

But what had Christ done? As he said of Jesus, this man has done nothing wrong. So just look at this scene. Everyone is represented.
Gentiles, Jews, rulers, common people, civil authorities, religious authorities, violent men, upstanding citizens. The openly wicked, the outwardly devout, and what unites every last person here in this moment.
What is the one thing all of these groups have in common? They despise Christ. When we hear some people talk about sin, we might get the impression that sin is little more than a mistake. Perhaps a few bad choices, but not really that big a deal in the grand scheme of things. Well, look again. Look at what these people are doing to Christ.
[15:40] They're not even turning a blind eye to his suffering. They are cheering it on. They are adding to it. This is what Paul means when he says, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

The carnal mind despises him. It actively opposes him. And the kind of sinfulness we see at the cross is a universal problem.
Now, we might be tempted to look back at this moment and think, how terrible? How could they ever do such a thing? Well, what we see in them is what we all are apart from grace.
In Romans 5, Paul says, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son. In Ephesians 2, he says, you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.
He's talking to Christians when he writes this. Apart from God's grace and Christ's redemptive power, there is no difference between those people who tortured and mocked Jesus at his crucifixion and us.
[17:17] So we should never think of our sin as some light matter. We opposed God himself. We despised God himself.

And think about this. Our sin was so serious, so pervasive, so offensive to God that nothing less than the death of his own son could atone for it.
And I might add that the sinfulness of man is not only seen in the cruelty of the cross, but the people's sheer blindness. What did Jesus pray?

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Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. They weren't innocent, of course, but their sin had made them blind. Here they were, looking up at the long-promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Righteous One, and they could not see him.
Where there was divine power, they saw nothing but weakness. Where there was victory, they saw defeat. Where there was glory, they saw nothing but shame.
[18:22] This is what sin does. It darkens the mind. It hardens the heart. And that was on full display at the cross. Now, the second thing the cross reveals is the substitution of Christ.

And this is really the heart of what's happening here, so we don't want to miss this. Did you notice how the entire narrative emphasizes Christ's innocence?
The repentant criminal said, this man has done nothing wrong. Now, I didn't go far enough back in the story to read this, but Pilate essentially said the same thing.
It seems that he did not want to crucify Jesus because he found no fault in him. Herod didn't want to condemn him, not in this way. Even the centurion standing at the foot of the cross says certainly this man was innocent.
In other words, Jesus does not belong on that cross. He's not a criminal. He's not a sinner. He has done nothing worthy of death, and yet there he is.
[19:30] Why? Well, he's not there for himself, but for others. He is a substitute. Think about what happened at the beginning of the narrative I read.

Jesus has led away to Golgotha to die, but Barabbas, the murderer, is set free. The guilty goes free. The innocent is condemned.
Barabbas is the one who deserved the death penalty, but Jesus takes his place. Then on the cross, what does the one criminal say to the other?
We are punished justly because we're getting back what we deserve for the things we did. But this man, speaking of Jesus, has done nothing wrong.
So there it is again, the guilty and the innocent, side by side, and the question is, what is Jesus doing there among the guilty? Well, the prophet Isaiah answers that question this way.
[20:34] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed.
Amen. A bit later, he writes, he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.
Or as Paul says to the Corinthians, for our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
[21:42] That's what's happening at the cross. Jesus is not there to suffer because of his own sins. He's there to suffer for the sins of many others.

And he could be their substitute in this judgment only because he is the sinless God-man. Since he had no sins for which to be judged, he could step in and take our place suffering the wrath that we deserved.
Derek Bingham has this convicting passage in one of his books that I wrote down years ago. He says, I gave him a crown of thorns.
He gave me a crown of righteousness. I gave him a cross to carry. He gave me his yoke, which is easy, his burden, which is light. I gave him nails through his hands.
He gave me safely into his father's hands, which no power can pluck me. I gave him a mock title. This is the king of the Jews. He gave me a new name and made me a king and a priest to God.
[22:51] I gave him no covering, stripping his clothes from him. He gave me a garment of salvation. I gave him mockery, casting the same in his teeth.

He gave me paradise. I gave him vinegar to drink. He gave me living water. I crucified and slew him on a tree. He gave me eternal life.
It was my sinfulness that put him there. It is his sinlessness that puts me here. And that wonderful substitutionary exchange was clearly on display at the cross.
Think of the thief who goes from reviling Christ to confessing his own sinfulness and pleading with Jesus to remember him when he enters into his kingdom.

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So even as Jesus seems to be at the point of utter defeat, this man says in effect, I believe you still have a kingdom. I believe that death will not be the end for you.
[23:55] I believe you can still save me. And indeed, Jesus says to him, truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Now what could that man have possibly done to help himself? He's at the point of death. After a life of crime, there's no chance at restitution, even if that were possible.
There's no good works he can perform in this moment. All he can do is cast himself upon the mercy of Christ, believing that Christ's death, what he was accomplishing there at that moment was enough to save him.
Why? Because the righteous one was taking the penalty of the unrighteous upon himself. And that leads to the third thing I want us to notice as we are lingering at the cross.
The cross reveals the accomplishment of redemption. From noon until roughly three in the afternoon, darkness suddenly covers everything.
[25:03] Now throughout scripture, darkness is often associated with the judgment of God. Think of the plague of darkness in Egypt, or think of the way the prophets describe the day of the Lord's judgment as being one of darkness.

Darkness signals judgment, signals divine wrath. And then, in the midst of this darkness, Jesus cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
This is where the real agony takes place. Forget what you saw in the passion of the Christ, or any other depiction of the crucifixion. This is the real agony.
There is no doubt that the nails were terrible. There is no doubt that the scourging was terrible. The humiliation was terrible. But the deepest suffering of the cross was not physical.
It was judicial. It was the son bearing the curse of sin, facing the wrath of his own father. As Paul says, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.
[26:15] That's what's happening in the darkness. That's what lies behind that awful cry. My God, why have you forsaken me? Well beyond his physical torture, Jesus was suffering the wrath of God for our sin.

Yet, at the end of this suffering, Jesus says, it is finished.
The work he came to do was accomplished. The scriptures were fulfilled. The price was paid. The sacrifice was offered. The wrath of God had been born, and the debt we owe had been canceled. Nothing was left undone. And immediately, immediately, the effects of this finished work become evident. The curtain in the sanctuary is torn from top to bottom.
Now that's not from bottom to top as though man were clawing his way into the presence of God. It's torn from top to bottom. God tears it. He opens up the way. The great barrier between holy God and sinful man is removed through the death of Christ.
[27:29] And then, the earth quakes and the rocks split. Tombs are open. Even creation itself seems to respond very dramatically to the death of its maker in the person of Christ.

And that centurion, seeing everything that had happened, said, truly, this was the Son of God. Now just think about the irony of that.
Earlier, the mockers were saying, if you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. That's supposed to prove it. But now, the centurion realizes that Jesus is the Son of God precisely because He does not come down from the cross.
He's staying on the cross. That became the proof of His death and was the accomplishment of redemption. And then, the apostle John says, He who saw this has testified so that you may also believe.
Believe what exactly? Believe that Jesus is the Christ. Believe that He truly died though He did not deserve it. Believe that the Scriptures were fulfilled in Him.
[28:46] Believe that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. the crucifixion doesn't leave us with a series of historical facts.

It is that. But it implores us to believe. if we are like the mocking crowds who rejected Him or like the indifferent soldiers who treated Him as nothing or the religious leaders who demanded His crucifixion though He was innocent, look again at what happened on that Friday.
See the sinfulness of man. See the substitution of Christ. See the accomplishment of redemption. And like the thief on the cross, we should be moved to confess our sins and to turn to Christ.

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Or like the centurion who stood at the foot of the cross, we should be moved to confess truly this man was the Son of God. Like the crowds, we should walk away beating our breasts over what we've seen.
And even after we have put our trust in Christ as our only hope for salvation, we should return to that cross over and over and over again to remind ourselves what happened on that day.
[30:10] Let us say with the Apostle Paul, far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Father in heaven, you are holy, infinitely, unapproachably holy.

You dwell in uncreated light. You are the, you are a pure eyes than to look upon evil. And yet tonight we have seen that you did not spare your own son, but you gave him up under the full weight of that holiness.
You are just in all your ways. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. And at the cross we see that you will by no means clear the guilty, not by ignoring sin, not by sweeping it aside, but by judging it fully in the person of your son.
And yet, oh God, we also see that you are merciful beyond comprehension, that you would devise a way for sinners, your enemies, to be brought near, that you would give your beloved son, that you would crush him for our iniquities, that you would lay on him the sin of us all.
This is not a small mercy. This is a love that is deep and costly beyond measure. We praise you, Father, for the Lamb who was slain.
[31:38] And Lord Jesus, we behold you now by faith, silent, before your accusers, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. You did not come down from that cross.

You stayed. You finished the work. And because you did, there is now no condemnation for those who are in you. How great you are, how worthy you are, how beautiful you are in your suffering and in your saving power.
And yet, Father, as we adore you, we must also confess we see ourselves at the cross. We were there in the mockery. We were there in the indifference.
We were there in the blindness. It was our sins that were laid upon your Son. It was our pride and our unbelief for which he was pierced.
So forgive us, Lord. Forgive us for how lightly we sometimes think of our sin. Forgive us for how quickly we move on from the cross. Forgive us for how often we have loved the world more than we've loved Christ or trusted in ourselves more than we've trusted in him.
[32:52] Cleanse us again, we pray. And not because the cross was insufficient, but because our hearts are so prone to wonder from what is sufficient.

And now, as we come to the table of the Lord's Supper, I pray that you would fix our eyes on Christ. We don't want to come casually. We don't want to come distracted. We want to come remembering. We want to come believing. We want to proclaim the Lord's death in this moment. Grant that the bread and the cup would not be empty signs for us, but means by which our faith is strengthened and that our love for Christ is deepened.
Make us like that thief who looked at Jesus and found mercy. Make us like that soldier who saw and confessed, truly, this was the Son of God.
Let us be a people who boasted nothing except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we ask all of this in His name. Amen. Amen.

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