

Rev. Calum Macdonald

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Preacher: Rev. Calum Macdonald

[0 : 00] I'd like us for a short time to turn to the Word of God. That passage that we read together in the New Testament Scriptures.

The Gospel of Luke and chapter 23. And we can read again at verse 35. Verse 35.

And so on. I recently bought a book, a second-hand book.

And it was a book about a once-renowned evangelist, a preacher of the Gospel called D.L. Moody. Some of you will know his name. He was an evangelist who crossed the Atlantic often.

[1 : 26] He was preaching in America and in the UK for many years. And it is thought that many came under the influence of his preaching throughout both countries.

One piece of advice he gives the preacher from his writings or taken from his writings is that every sermon should have Christ in it.

Every sermon should have Christ in it. Now, if you're a preacher, like I preach. I try to preach anyway. I was caught by that statement.

And I was thinking, well, it's easy enough to have Christ in a sermon if Christ is the focus of the passage that you're preaching on. But what if you're preaching on a passage from the Old Testament scriptures?

Or what if you're preaching from the Book of Psalms? Sometimes you have to work hard to find Christ in these passages. But then I was thinking, one way or another, all the scripture, which is the word of God to us, directs us in some way to think about Christ.

[2 : 49] And that's the most important thing. Sometimes it takes us a while to get there. But eventually, even in the most diverse passage that seems to have nothing to do with the New Testament teachings, there is something there that prepares us for the work of Christ and prepares us for what Christ has to do when he comes into the world.

So I then began to think along these lines. What is it that is most important for us? As those who sit under God's word, what is the most important thing that we need to hear about?

And I suppose there are many things you could argue are important. If not essential. But I was thinking that for myself, one of the most important things that any one of us needs to hear about is the fact that Jesus Christ came into this world to die on the cross on behalf of sinners.

We need to hear that. We need to believe that. And we need to adjust our life in the light of what it says to us.

If our lives need adjustment. In this passage that we have chosen for our sermon today, it's a passage that's full of Christ, obviously, because it tells us about him being cross-examined, first of all, by Pilate, and then Herod, and then Pilate giving Christ over to the people, to the mob who are paying for his blood.

[4 : 54] And he gives him over to them for crucifixion. We took up the reading at verse 26, where Jesus is making his way to Golgotha, carrying his cross.

And he's aided by Simon of Cyrene. And then we have an account of his death on the cross. I want us to think about his death.

And there are many things that this passage brings home to us about his death. And I want us to think about that today. Especially the reaction of the people to the suffering that they are witnessing on the cross.

Four things that we can attach our thoughts to, I hope. The first is, how do you respond to a detailed study of the sufferings of our Saviour?

This is a question for yourself. When you read a passage like this one, which is exclusively to do with the sufferings of Christ, his death, his physical death on the cross, and all the aspects involved in it.

[6 : 17] Now, there are passages from the Old Testament that speak of this. There are passages in the epistles that speak of the death of Christ. But this is a description, a first-hand description, of everything that was involved in Christ being crucified.

So, when we read through such a passage, and when we engage in the detail of it, and try and understand something of it, how do we feel when we do that?

The second question that I want to ask is, what do we understand as a reason for the sufferings that are detailed for us here?

What reason is given for these sufferings? The third thing, what lies at the heart of the reaction of some that is recorded for us?

And the fourth thing, come back again to remind ourselves of the ultimate end of the crucifixion, the ultimate end of the cross, if you like.

[7 : 40] Now, over many years, I have heard a number of sermons preached on the crucifixion of Christ.

And before I ever entered into the ministry, I heard it said, and I said often, that especially when it came to a communion Sabbath, that the sermon should major on the sufferings of Christ.

Either the sufferings of Christ on the cross, as we have it here, or the sufferings of Christ that he endures leading up to the cross in Gethsemane, and so on.

And that when we came to remembering the death of Christ, as we do in our communion service, it should be natural for us to think of the death of Christ as being central to that.

Now, I know that many do not follow that example today for different reasons, I would imagine. And perhaps at a practical level, many people celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently, and maybe they do not see the need for a frequent attendance on this particular area of study.

[9 : 13] Maybe that is the case. But I know that some are not comfortable dwelling upon the physical sufferings of Christ.

They are not comfortable dwelling on the emotional sufferings of Christ. They are not comfortable dwelling on the spiritual sufferings of Christ.

All of these elements are there, and yet some people feel terribly uncomfortable when they have to spend time thinking about it.

And one reason given for not being too often involved in this is that the suspicion that when a preacher engaged in preaching that focuses on the sufferings of Christ, that they are merely doing so to stimulate the emotions of the congregation, to stir up the emotions and to get the congregation to feel empathy or sympathy or sorrow, so much so that they are emotionally moved themselves.

Now, whether you agree with such a statement or such a comment or not, I would say that it is wrong if we read the Word of God, even privately, or gather together with others as we read the Word of God, where it focuses upon the sufferings of Christ, and we are left unmoved by it.

[10 : 58] But something is wrong when that is the case. We are divorcing ourselves with the reality of what the Word of God is setting before us.

And if we are unmoved by it, and if our emotions are not stirred by it, there is something the matter. I know we do not want to let our emotions run riot.

We want to be in control. But our own generation is a generation that suffers, I think, from a distancing.

I think that much of what we are exposed to through different media characterizes the senses against the reality of what we are presented with here.

because we are so often confronted with the fictions that dabble in suffering and focus on suffering, and it becomes a fiction, it becomes an unreal experience to us.

[12 : 18] So that when we are presented with the reality of the sufferings of Christ, the two meld together, and we lose sight of the reality of it, and we suffer because of it.

Now the Scripture is presenting to us sufferings the like of which this world knows nothing of. because what we are presented with is the sufferings of a Savior who has come into the world to die on the cross for sinners.

And the reason for that is that he is to encounter the holy judgment of God upon sin as the sin bearer, and his sufferings must accord with that.

And the reality of his sufferings are such that that we cannot deny them, nor can we deny our interest in them, because if we are Christian, then we believe Christ is on the cross because of our sin.

And they are our sins that he is dying for. They are our sins that he is being punished for. They are our sins that he is suffering for. And we cannot separate ourselves from that.

[13:39] His sufferings are real. It is a crucible of torture. It is an inhumane treatment of a human being, entirely undeserving.

And that's what we are presented with. Now, we must remember that we cannot equate ourselves with those who were eyewitnesses to the cross and who occupied a position of hostility towards Christ.

And it would seem that if we are not moved by what we see, moved by what he is experiencing, that we are closer in affinity to those who are hostile to him than we are to those who understand that his sufferings are sufferings on behalf of the sinners of which we are a part.

If you read carefully, there are those who are present at the cross. They are moved by what they see. They are grieved by what they see.

They are pricked in their heart by what they see. A Roman centurion was able to profess that this was the work of God. He made a confession that the hand of God was in it because of what he saw.

[15:20] Somebody who had no interest in Christ. Somebody who had no prior experience of Christ as far as we know. And yet, the very eyewitness experience moved him to confess Christ in this way.

Now, was it simply for emotional stimulus or in some way to feel grief, even a temporary grief, that the word of God is so detailed in the way that it brings before us the sufferings of Christ?

You know, we could easily know that Christ died by a simple statement to that end. And we have it in the scriptures, in the epistles, a statement of fact.

Christ died on the cross. But here, the detail is such that it goes into the physical extremities of the pain that he endured.

So why did he die? Why did he die? Why the suffering? Well, I believe with many others that all that he endured, he had to endure no more and no less.

[16:46] No more and no less. I don't think Christ had to suffer anything that he that he was not meant to suffer.

Even the the the things that you see happen to him that appear to us to be to be minor in comparison with with all else that was going on.

Every single part of his sufferings and every part of the despite that was done to his body formed part of what had to happen to him as the sin bearer under God's command under God's sovereign will.

The spear that was thrust into his side even after him dying that was part of the the hole and it could not be excluded but nothing could be intruded into it that was not permitted by God.

His death was in order that he may by his by his death redeem the lost be a saviour to sinners and that is what the record of the gospel brings to us.

[18:16] The testimony of the scripture is that he was in the world to die. Whatever was in his death whatever the sufferings that was necessary for him to fulfil the role of redeemer of sinners.

Even before he was born his mother was forewarned that he was to be born. She was told by an angel behold you will bring conceiving your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus.

Joseph was confronted by an angel and he was given the same information. You shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.

This was God's purpose to send his son into the world. He was to be Emmanuel God with us in order to save.

I know that your minister quotes Bishop Ryle often. I don't mind quoting him today just to make you feel at home. Bishop Ryle wrote the following Our mighty substitute Our representative Our head Our surety Our proxy The divine friend who undertook to stand in our stead and by the priceless merit of his sufferings to purchase our salvation.

[19:57] The apostle Paul in one of his epistles tells us remember Paul was an enemy of the cross. Paul was an enemy of Jesus Christ but he came to make a confession.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. He understood the scripture. He understood the sufferings. He understood the meaning of them and no doubt he came to dwell on them. Dwell on them to the degree that he wanted to get to grips with what happened in the life of Christ.

God made his mission known throughout the world and yet we have the cross. He came to save and the salvation could not take place without the cross.

Not without the nail pierced hands and feet. Not without the crown of thorns upon the head. Not without the mockery that we read of here in this passage.

[21 : 09] Specifically the placard that was placed above his head. The king of the Jews to mock him. It doesn't stop there.

Look at the passage before us closely. The rulers scoffed at him. The soldiers mocked him. The criminals railed at him. That was part of the suffering of Christ.

You could say, well, surely it wasn't as bad as the physical sufferings that he had to endure. Surely the scourging of Christ, surely the beatings of Christ, the plugging of the hair of his beard, those who beat him with their hands, those who took delight in torturing him, surely that wasn't, that was the worst, the sinnet of his sufferings as it were.

But every element that he had to endure that was part of his sufferings, you could not separate them out from one another and say, this was unnecessary and this was a lesser sort, because they were all meant to deal the blow of death upon the Christ of God in order to be the redeemer of sinners.

God is the God is the mockery, which is what we have in this passage here repeatedly. What is it all about?

[22 : 54] Max Lucado, some of you may have read one of his many books, or he has written many books anyway. One of the books is called, no wonder they call him the saviour.

no wonder they call him saviour. And he asks the very question, why the mockery? They hurl verbal stones with every intention of bruising and breaking they were meant to wound.

What does that got to do with the sufferings of Christ? Well, Christ died on the cross for sinners, whose pain, whose suffering included the mockery because his death was for sinners.

And when sinners come to study his death, they find there all the elements that are necessary to make him a saviour to which they can go.

A saviour who understands them. God is dealing with him as a malefactor, as a sin breaker, as a lawbreaker, a sinner, because the penalty due to the breach of a broken law, or the breach of a law, is borne by him in his body.

[24 : 25] But for the sinner who lives in the world in his name, they will know that the mockery that he endured is carried out against his body.

Just as Lucado says, every word that was launched against him is like a stone designed to hurt and to maim and to hire him, questioning his authority, questioning his position as the saviour, questioning his role as the king of kings.

And yet Jesus prays for them. Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.

If you are a Christian today, you can go to the cross and there you find something that you may have to endure.

Nobody will take you and crucify you, I hope. It has happened in other countries where Christians are maltreated because of their Christianity.

[25 : 41] There are people in the world today, at the present moment, and they are very in fear for their lives because of the enmity that is in the world against them.

But if you are a Christian, don't be surprised if people mock you with the same animosity and enmity that was directed towards the body of Christ because you, a Christian, are part of that body.

We have a selection of sources from which the arrows came. The arrows designed to wound the people, the soldiers, the priests, the thieves.

as Locato puts it, all of them firing the arrows of Satan. And today you will find people still willing to fire his arrows.

But the final thing we need to remind ourselves of is to come back again. Why was Christ on the cross? He was on the cross because he was to redeem his people from their sins.

[26 : 56] When you look at the scriptures, when you look at the passages of scripture that describe to us the sufferings, it's very detailed, but the prophecies, you read through Isaiah again and again, Isaiah takes you to the cross.

Hundreds of years before Christ was crucified, he directs your attention to the sufferings of the Lord. Isaiah 53, go to the Psalms, Psalm 22, Psalm 69, you'll find there in detail the nature of the sufferings of Christ because God intended that these sufferings would be spoken of and understood

for what they were, that they were not the random attack of people who were poisoned against him, but something that was necessary for him to fulfill the role of a redeemer of sinners.

God did not change the purpose for which he came. God appointed him Messiah, one who would be sitting as king over his own people, and he came to seek and to save the lost.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, we read there, just another reminder, I suppose, of what God intends by the death of Christ.

Chapter 10, chapter 9, I think it is, and verse 11. When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is not of this creation, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by the means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

[29 : 15] That is the reason why Christ died on the cross. He came to seek and to save the lost.

There are those who are here, according to Mark's gospel, those who stood by blasphemed him, walking their heads and saying, you who destroyed the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.

They didn't believe his word, they didn't believe him. When you read his word, do you believe him? do you believe that he came into the world to save sinners?

If you're a Christian, you do believe, you do trust in his word, that it is a word that speaks to you of sufferings, the lack of which no one should have to endure.

But he did so willingly. All of the torments, all of the abuse, all of the abandonment, even the abandonment of God himself, so it seems.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? All of that was to be in his experience so that it wouldn't be in the experience of any who would believe in him.

[30 : 42] We should think often of Christ in all the ways he is able to be thought of, thinking of his infancy if we can, thinking of his coming to maturity where we can, thinking of his obedience to the will of the Father, and thinking of where it took him and why.

Because salvation can only be wrought by his hand. It can be ours only by believing that he had done what he did for the sinner.

even such as we are. God encourages us to believe the truth concerning him. Whether we can ever, we can ever, there's no question, we can ever experience what he endured.

But please, whatever you do, believe that what he endured is no fiction. The reality of it is there to be understood.

And may God in his mercy direct your hearts and minds to think often of that, that you may appreciate him more as the saviour of your souls.

[31 : 58] Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we give thanks that you are a saviour to sinners and that all who have ever experienced the grace of God in their lives can never separate it from the knowledge that you have imparted to us of his work finished, even on the cross.

Bless us in his name, we pray, and remember all who would seek him out today. Forgive our sins, in Jesus' name. Amen. Our closing Psalm, Psalm 89.

Psalm 89, and from the Scottish Psalter, and three verses from verse 24 to the June heaven. My mercy and my faithfulness with him yet still shall be.

My mercy and my faithfulness with him yet still shall be.

And in my name his horn and heart men shall exult see.

[33 : 28] membrane fare be. He shall reach afar while sails in mercy and his right un And establish it shall in the rivers see.

Thou art my Father, He shall guide, Thou art my God alone.

And He shall save the heart thereof all my salvation.

Now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all now and always. Amen.