

The Crucifixion

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning everyone. And a warm welcome to the service this morning. And a special welcome to those who are visiting with us. It's good to have one or two with us this morning.

And you're very welcome. There's tea and coffee at the end of the service. And all would be encouraged to stay. These are sitting on my lectern just now.

They definitely don't belong to me. So I presume somebody's left them. And I'll leave them on the front there for somebody to pick up. The intimations you have on the sheets.

And they've been on the screen before the service began. And if I could just highlight one or two of these intimations. Evening service at 6, 6 to 7 tonight. As we come towards the end of Zechariah.

If I could highlight this coming Wednesday, the prayer meeting. It will be a joint meeting with Operation Mobilization. This is a meeting that actually was organised by Mark from Leverborough.

[1 : 0 1] Mark McLeod, the minister from Leverborough. And he asked if it could be had here. And if Scalpy and Leverborough and ourselves could come together. To hear about the ministry of OM.

And to have a time of prayer. So that's this coming Wednesday at half past seven. So please be encouraged to go to that. There's no Jam and Connect this weekend. I'm afraid. So sorry about that.

There's no Jam and Connect on Friday. But as you can see here. We have the communion weekend from Thursday through till Sunday. The details of the services you have there on the sheet.

I won't go through them all. But you can see them there for yourselves. There is a fellowship on Saturday and Sunday night here in the church. There's one on Friday night in the manse.

But for Saturday and for Sunday night. Just in terms of the catering. Team three are on duty. So the sign up sheets for food at the door. If you're able to help with that. Please do so.

[2 : 0 0] The rest of the intimations on the sheet. I'll allow you to read at your own convenience.

Two more things. One is to say to the Connect leaders. If you could stay behind for five minutes at the end of the service.

And we'll just meet through the back there. Just one thing that we want to talk about. And the final intimation is just as follows here.

The Care and Share Cafe being run by senior pupils from Siree Scott School. Is on every Tuesday morning from 11 to 1 in the Tarbert Community Centre.

There's no cost. However, donations will be kindly accepted. All ages welcome. Come along for some tea and cake. And an opportunity to meet up with other people within the Harris community. So that's a worthy outreach. And an opportunity to have tea and cake and meet together with some people. So Tuesday 11 to 1 in the Community Centre. These I think now are all the intimations.

[3 : 0 4] If you could turn back now to the passage that we read in Mark 15 please. And have that open before you if possible. And we'll pray as we go there.

Heavenly Father we thank you again for your word. We thank you that we don't have to stand here and think up our own thoughts to share. We thank you that you have given us your word.

And your word carries with it an authority which speaks into our lives. So we pray that the musings of a man's mind here would not be heard.

But we pray that the voice of God through Scripture would be heard. And that we would see Jesus. We thank you that you are a God who shines on us with your face.

We thank you that you are a God of grace. A God who loves to bless us. And we pray for that blessing. And we pray for that encounter with Jesus.

[4 : 0 0] In the verses as we study them. So help us Lord we pray. Pour out your spirit upon us we pray. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Mark chapter 15.

And we really focus today on the verses from the verse marked 40 through to the end of the chapter.

Although I read a little bit more than that just to set it in context. But today as we study these verses I'm conscious as many of us are conscious of the fact that this time next week as we gather together God willing.

We gather so with a particular purpose. We gather next Lord's Day to meet around the Lord's table. What does that mean? Well it means that there is bread that we take and there is wine that we take. And as we do so we remember the Lord's death until he comes. We take the bread and it speaks of his body. We take the wine and it speaks of the blood of Jesus.

[5 : 14] And if we're trusting the Lord Jesus we do this to remember him. And so we meet together next weekend God willing with that particular purpose.

We meet together to remember the Lord's death. And I want to just note that as we approach this passage today.

What we remember in coming together for communion. It's a fact. We remember something which is embedded in history.

We remember the reality of Jesus' death. It's not a myth. It's not an allegory. It's not a kind of mystical picture.

This is a fact. And I could have gone to texts which weren't biblical texts. But were non-biblical historical texts.

[6 : 11] I could have gone to Josephus and Tacitus and Pliny the Younger. And some of these historians from Jesus' day. And opened them up and showed that the death of Jesus and the life of Jesus.

It's not something which is a myth. It's a recorded historical fact. There may be debate about who Jesus is and what he did. But there can be no debate.

No dispute about the fact that he lived and he died. It's a fact. And Mark. Mark.

Where I want our focus to be on today. Rather than on historical, non-biblical texts. Mark. In the verses that we read. He makes plain.

That the death of Jesus is an indisputable fact. He makes clear that the death of Jesus really happened. And he does so by pointing us to various witnesses.

[7 : 12] And that's our first point. To structure our thoughts this morning. We see here, first of all, witnesses. So who do we see in the witness stand?

Well, first of all, we see some woman. Verse 40. That's how it's put. Some woman we're watching from a distance. They were there.

In fact, Mark is more specific than that. He says in verse 40. Among them were Mary Magdalene. Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph.

And Salome. So Mark not only in taking witnesses into focus. He not only takes some woman into focus here. But he tells us their names.

And he tells everybody who was reading the text on the first day it was presented. The names of real people. Now, why does he do that? Well, the reason he does that was that so anyone who doubted the truth of this could actually go and find these women and ask, did it really happen this way?

[8 : 32] You are witnesses. Tell me what happened. Remember, this gospel, this piece of writing that Mark prepares as God the Spirit guides him.

It was being read. It was in general circulation 20 to 30 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. So the likelihood is these women were still alive.

And certainly people were still alive who knew these women and the families of these women. So Mark names them. And in doing so, in a sense, he's saying to the skeptic, to the doubter, if you're doubting this, go and find them.

Ask them yourself. Verse 47. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph, they saw where he was laid. So we have witnesses.

And the first witnesses are these women. The second witness that we have here is Joseph of Arimathea, verse 43.

[9 : 39] Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the council who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

So we have the second witness here who's brought to the stand. It's Joseph of Arimathea. And this is a man who has a bit of gravitas to him.

He's a prominent member of the council, we're told. He's an elder. He's somebody that people looked up to. He's known in the religious and the political world. He's a man who had some power, some status.

He's a man whose word would have carried a bit of weight in that place at that time. Joseph of Arimathea, says Mark.

He's a witness. And for some time, it seems that Joseph of Arimathea has been watching Jesus along with the rest of the Sanhedrin.

[10:39] He's watched Jesus as he lived and as he ministered. He's listened to Jesus as he spoke and as he wrestled with some of his colleagues.

And now Joseph of Arimathea, he watched Jesus as he died and was buried. So he's a second witness.

And the third witness is the centurion. We have some women. And they're named. They can be gone to for backing up of what Mark is saying.

There's Joseph of Arimathea here. A notable man in that place. And the third witness is the centurion. Verse 44. Pilate. Pontius Pilate.

We know him. We've looked at him. He was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. So summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died.

[11:47] And when he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body of Jesus to Joseph. Now, if anyone was in a position to give an expert opinion on whether Jesus was really dead, whether he had really died, it was the centurion.

And this is a man whose business, whose profession was executing people. That's where his qualifications lay.

That's where his qualifications lay. He's an expert killer. And we know from the centurion. And we know from the verses, verse 39, that this centurion, he stood there in front of Jesus.

He stood there in front of Jesus. Jesus was on the cross as he was dying. The centurion, he stood there in front of Jesus.

He, with his own ears, heard the cry of Jesus. He had seen Jesus up close. And he was so impacted by the death of Jesus that this centurion cried out in verse 39, Surely this man was the Son of God.

[13:13] The centurion would have seen many, many people die. This was no shock to him. This was not something that would normally have an impact on him. But as he stood there in front of Jesus, as he heard Jesus cry, as he saw how he died, he said, Surely this man was different.

This man was the Son of God. So this centurion is certainly able to bear witness to the fact that Jesus really and truly died.

So we have these three sets of witnesses to the fact that Jesus died. He didn't faint. He didn't swoon, as some of the critics tried to say.

But he physically, he factually, he died. J.C. Ryle, the old commentator, says this. He says, Three kinds of witnesses, says Ryle, Three kinds of witnesses to the fact are brought before us in the verses we have here.

The Roman centurion who stood near the cross, the woman who followed Jesus, our Lord from Galilee to Jerusalem, the disciples who buried him, all were witnesses that Jesus really died.

[14:57] Their united evidence is above suspicion. They could not be deceived. What they saw was no swoon or trance or temporary insensibility.

They saw that same Jesus who was crucified lay down his life and become obedient even unto death. Let this be established in our minds.

Our Savior really and truly died. One thing I want to note before we move on, it's just the fact that God, in the ordering of how he does things, he often selects unusual witnesses.

I mean, the testimony of women in this day and age, when Jesus was walking around in Galilee, it was inadmissible.

In a court of law, the testimony of a woman was not admissible. The authorities, the civil authorities, would not have women in the stand as witnesses.

[16:11] But God determines he would put these women in the stand. They would be his witnesses. I mean, the centurion, this hardened Roman soldier, he's the first person to confess that

Jesus is the Son of God.

And now God uses him to bear witness to the death of Jesus, the death that changed his life. And then Joseph of Arimathea, another contrasting figure.

This is a man who had a lot to lose if he was to throw his lot in with Jesus. This is a man who was well connected. He had a reputation in the political and the religious scene.

This is an unlikely disciple of Jesus. And yet he's a disciple who's now called to bear witness. And the point of application is this.

If Jesus selects these people to be his witnesses, why not you to be his witness?

[17 : 29] Now you might think you're an unlikely witness to Jesus in this place at this time. They could all have said the same thing. Surely there's people who are better witnesses than me, they could have said, but God says, no, no, I want you to bear witness.

He puts them in that place at that time. Now you might say, as I might say, as I come to terms with the challenge to be a witness in Tarbert and North Harris at this point in time, when the culture is increasingly hostile to Christianity, you might say, well, if I speak about Jesus, who's going to listen to me?

Well, these women could certainly have said that. Who listened to us? But they still spoke up. You might say, well, if I speak about Jesus, then there will be much to lose.

There's reputational damage in speaking about Christ at this point. People may point, people may laugh, people may scorn, people may think less of me if I start to speak about Jesus.

Well, Joseph of Arimathea certainly had that risk running in his life. The centurion, what would his soldiers say if they hear him speaking about Jesus being the Son of God?

[19 : 07] And yet he spoke. He took his turn in the witness stand. So will you and I not take our turn in the witness stand and tell people about Jesus?

You might say, well, what can I say? I'm not eloquent. I don't have words. I don't have vast knowledge. You just tell people the facts. The good news about Jesus is not your and mine impressions and emotions.

It's the facts. That Jesus lived. That Jesus died. That Jesus rose. That Jesus is the Son of God. These are the things that we are to bear witness of. Not the feelings in our tummy that speaking about Jesus may arise. We tell people facts.

So we have witnesses. That's the first point. The second point is woman. And I don't want to make too much of this but I do want to underline the fact that we read here about some woman.

[20 : 27] Verse 40. Some woman were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed Jesus and cared for his needs.

Many other women who had come up with them to Jerusalem were also there. So just let's note that point that Mark draws attention to.

We see some woman here. The disciples are long gone. They've scattered. These brave men who said everybody else may scatter but we'll be there till the end.

They're long gone. But these women they're still there. They're in the distance yes but they're still there.

One of the commentators Donald English says for all the strong protestations of loyalty by the men at the end it was the woman who saw it through.

[21 : 41] Now why does Mark tell us this? Now is Mark telling us this to try and score some bonus points off the feminist lobby as they're listing?

No he's not because there was no feminist lobby. Political correctness was not a thing at the time that Mark is writing.

It's a very different world that he's writing into. So why does he say this? why does he highlight so strikingly that the fact that these women were there?

Well he highlights that because they were there. He underlines this because it's the way it happened. It's embarrassing for the men to be such failures.

it was embarrassing for the men to be so disloyal to Jesus in spite of all their protestations to be so cowardly but that's what happened.

[22 : 46] And so Mark who is led by the Holy Spirit as he writes he records the fact that the men were gone but some women were there.

Now if you think about our culture for a second critics of Christianity today will often say that women are suppressed and they are overlooked and that they're kept under the thumb in the Christian world.

Now that's what people who want to attack Jesus and who want to attack Christianity that's the angle they often come in by but yet as we look at scripture and as we look at Jesus' life we see that's not the truth.

It's the propaganda but it's not the truth. During Jesus' ministry we study history and we look at Jesus we see that he had a counter culture respect for women in the purest possible sense. Jesus cared for these women and he loved them. So it's no surprise to read here about these women who were there when the men were not.

[24 : 14] And just by way of application before we move on I think it's fair to say that this happened back then and still often this is the case in the family home when it comes to opening the Bible and family worship but when it comes to teaching the children about Jesus things very often some women are there doing that and the men are nowhere to be seen.

In the church I would say we're probably quite unusual here because we have a reasonable balance but if you look at the church in the UK in general there are many women who are there and the men are all too often absent.

So Mark's words they were a challenge to the men in Jesus' day and I think they need to be still a challenge to the men in our day.

some of us men I think have to step up take our spiritual responsibilities perhaps a little more seriously than we sometimes do.

So we have witnesses we have women we have a third point here which is waiting. So who was waiting? Well as we scan down through the text here we see that Joseph was waiting.

[25 : 53] Joseph of Arimathea he was waiting. And what was he waiting for? Well we're told in verse 43 that he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Joseph of Arimathea a prominent member of the council verse 43 who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God.

Sinclair Ferguson the commentator says Joseph of Arimathea was a man who had searched the scriptures with a genuine longing for the kingdom of God.

Think that word waiting has that sense of longing within it. And it's an interesting thing to think about for a moment. What is it that you long for? What is it that you and I think about when we're not thinking about anything else?

When we're sitting in a chair we've stopped listening and we're daydreaming. We're looking out the window where are our minds? What is it that we're thinking of?

What is it that we're longing for? What is it that we daydream about? Well for Joseph of Arimathea it seems that he was a man who had a genuine longing.

[27 : 08] He was waiting for the kingdom of God. And we see that in his life. He's a man who tried to be a good man. Luke tells us that in Luke chapter 23.

He tried to be a good and an upright man. He tried to live well. But that wasn't enough to cause God's kingdom that he was waiting for to come in his life.

His own good living wasn't enough to bring him to that point of having arrived. He's a man who in his day would have known the Bible. Day by day St.

McFerguson says he would have searched the scriptures. Likely he had great head knowledge. He was an expert in these biblical texts but that wasn't enough to cause the kingdom of God to come in his life.

He's still waiting. He moved in religious circles. The kind of guy who wouldn't be sitting at the back but he would have been standing at the front in these religious meetings.

[28 : 15] He's a man who held office as a member of the council of the Sanhedrin. But that wasn't enough to cause God's kingdom to come in his life.

He's still waiting. And then he meets Jesus. And as he sees Jesus live and as he listens to Jesus preach and as he witnesses these miracles that Jesus was performing, as he sees the compassion with which Jesus ministered to the crowds, as he observes the wisdom that Jesus employed to be able to wrangle with and get the better of these religious leaders who were so against him, Joseph of Arimathea, as he watches Jesus, he soon comes to realise that Jesus is not just a good man but he's the God man.

He recognises in time as he watches Jesus live that Jesus is not just another rabbi. He's not just another religious teacher.

But he is the one that the whole religious system was pointing towards. And now Joseph of Arimathea, having seen Jesus die with that sign above the cross, the king of the Jews, Joseph, it seems, is now convinced that Jesus is king of the kingdom.

And with the coming of Jesus into the world, Joseph is convinced that the waiting was over. And the kingdom of God in Christ had come.

[30 : 16] Do you see that? Do we see that this morning? You know, we can be like Joseph of Arimathea, we can try to live a good life, it's not enough.

We can become experts in the scriptures and be able to recite the catechisms, it's not enough. We can move in religious circles and become comfortable sitting in meetings in different churches, it's not enough.

We need to see that Jesus is who he said he is. We need to see that Jesus is the king of the Jews, he is the king of kings, he is the Lord, he is the saviour, he is the son of God.

And Joseph now saw that. Matthew tells us that in Matthew 27, he tells us that Joseph had become a disciple of Jesus, that John, in a note on Joseph of Arimathea in John 19, says that Joseph of Arimathea, he was a disciple of Jesus, yes, but secretly, says John, for fear of the Jews.

It's a secret disciple. Are there any secret disciples here this morning? I can't help thinking that there must be. And I'll tell you why.

[31 : 47] It's because every time we seem to come round to communion season, it's not my planning, but we seem to keep being reintroduced to these characters.

believers. The Bible tells us about two secret disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Over time, they believe in Jesus, but they have much to lose.

They have friends, they have colleagues who will scorn them, who will make life difficult for them. So they believe, but they're secret believers. They fear the Jews.

And every time a communion season comes round, we seem to keep on seeing them. Remember the first day that we came into this church, and Rory Morrison, as he preached, he preached on Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

And I remember in the last service in the community center, we were in the same text, and we've been there since. There are secret disciples here.

[32 : 57] those who are fearful. We have an example in Joseph of Arimathea who steps forward, an encouragement for those who are in secrecy to step forward and make themselves known.

There's an opportunity next Sunday for those who have been in secrecy to step forward and make yourselves known. because it's not okay to be a secret disciple.

It's not okay to have faith, but to hide it. It's not okay to be silent and inaudible about your trust in Christ.

And I think we have an illustration of that as the passage closes, and that's our final point very briefly. The last W is works. grace. And we tend to shy away from that word because we know that we're saved, we're forgiven, we're made Christians, not by what we do, it's what Christ did.

We're saved by grace. What is grace? It's a word that we often use, but we think about grace, whenever I think about grace, I think about it like an anagram almost on the wall, G-R-A-C-E.

[34 : 16] What does grace mean? It means God's riches, his forgiveness, his salvation, his eternal life, God's riches at Christ's expense.

It takes us to the cross. We see Christ being expended on the cross, we see him working for our salvation. So God's riches, all the blessings that he wants to give us, Jesus has paid for.

It's all by grace. And Paul, as he comes to know that in Ephesians 2, he says that. He says, it's by grace you have been saved through faith.

That's not from yourselves. It's the gift of God, not by works that no one can boast. And we put an amen to that. But the verse goes on, and Paul says then, for we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So we're saved by grace, but we're saved for works. Works that God has prepared in advance for each believer to do.

[35 : 31] And for Joseph, there was a particular work that had been prepared hundreds of years before time for him to do.

In Isaiah 53, 600 years before the cross, God speaking through Isaiah, as Isaiah speaks about Jesus, says that he was put in a rich man's grave.

That's the prophecy. We have all the sufferings of Jesus in Isaiah 53. We see the cross, but we also see where Jesus' body will be laid.

he was put in a rich man's grave. Now, those who were crucified were not put in a rich man's grave. They were thrown into a trench.

Because that was part of the shame of crucifixion. A big open grave. And the birds and the animals would get to their bodies. But for Jesus, he was put in a rich man's grave.

[36 : 38] Whose grave could that be? Joseph. He was a rich man. And this was the time for Joseph, the secret believer, to step up to Pilate and to speak up for Jesus and to give up his own grave so that Jesus' body could be laid in it.

these were the works that were prepared in advance for Joseph of Arimathea to do. These were the works that demonstrated the reality of the fact that Joseph of Arimathea had taken hold of the grace of Jesus.

Jesus. And these were the works that would be blessed beyond Joseph's wildest imaginations because it was out of Joseph's tomb that Jesus would rise.

So let us be encouraged as we finish to receive the grace of Jesus if we've never done so before. To ask for that forgiveness. To ask for these riches. To ask for this gift of salvation. But having received it, let us not keep our heads down and our feet up.

[38 : 13] but let us like Joseph step up and speak up and give up our own lives and ambitions for the glory of Jesus.

We'll pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this passage. We thank you for the reality of the fact that you, Father, sent your Son, Jesus, into this world to live and to die for us so that our sins could be forgiven and that we could not perish but take hold of the gift of eternal life.

We ask Lord that each one of us would take hold of that gift, that you would open our eyes, that we would see it, that we would see our need of it. We pray that we would be encouraged as we see these witnesses, as we see those who spoke up for Jesus.

Help us, we pray, to be those who have the courage to speak up, to step up, to even give up our own ambitions and our own selfish ambitions often, so that you can use us to draw other people to see the glory of Jesus.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.