Jesus on the Cross

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[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Northean. I'm looking at an amazing bit of the Bible.

And what I'm going to do is we're going to read the whole chunk together. I haven't put it up on the screen because I wasn't quite sure I'd do it this way. So we're going to read it. I'll read it out loud. And if you... Almost. Almost, Dan. Good effort.

I know, I think I've given you the wrong verses, so you can catch up in a sec. So they may appear on the screen, but we're going to be looking at, again, at Jesus on the cross. And this time we're expanding it a little bit further than when Luke preached a few weeks ago to include some different reactions of different people around him at the time.

And so we're going to be in Mark chapter 15. If you've got it on an app or in your Bible, or you will eventually see them up here one way or another because they're in my presentation as well. And we're starting at verse 27.

And we'll read down to verse 41. And if you haven't got either of those, just listen along. And I'm going to pray for us just now. Father God, we long to hear from you by your Spirit.

[1:36] God, as we get into the Word just now, do you both open our hearts and open your heart to us that we might know you better, that we might hear from you.

And, yeah, God, you'd speak right into us, drawing out things that you want from us in our reaction to it.

And that we would be in awe of your great worth and we'd be aware of our great need for you. Open the Scriptures to us, Lord. Amen.

So it says here, they crucified two rebels with him. Verse 27. One on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insights at him, shaking their heads and saying, So, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself.

In the same way, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. He saved others, they said, but he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we might see and believe.

[2:56] Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon and at three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, at lemma sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, listen, he's calling Elijah. Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff and offered it to Jesus to drink.

Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down, he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

And when the centurion who stood in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, surely this man was the son of God.

Some women who were watching from a distance, among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger, and Joseph and Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs.

[4:12] Many other women who'd also come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. So here's the plan. We're going to look at four, I've chunked these into four groups that we're going to spend some time looking at together.

And we're going to go through these scriptures again pretty fast. So if you have got them in your Bible or on an app and you want to, you can either try and follow along or I've put some individual highlight points up on the screen here.

And what we want to do is, each one goes in this format, we're going to look at the scriptures, we're going to ask what it means for us, and then we'll look at the so what. So what does it mean for us or what might we take from it?

When I was thinking about this, it's an odd link, but bear with me. I've got this lad in my class I teach on a Monday and Tuesday.

And I'm going to call him Desire because I can't give you his real name because I'm about to tell you quite a lot about him. And he is just this lovely, gentle guy, right? So he's a delight to have in this slightly bonkers first year class I teach.

[5:14] So they're like a box of frogs, quite frankly. And this guy, just sure and stable, really attentive. So he kind of stood out to me the first week I met him. I thought, wow, you really pay attention. And about three weeks into teaching him, he just wasn't there.

And it said EXC on our register when I went to register him, which means excluded. And I thought, Desire excluded? Like, what on earth is going on with him? And then my email went ping just as the class were arriving and it said yes because he has punched a third year in the face.

I was like, there must be a case of mistaken identity. This does not happen. Like, what is this little, little meek kid, this little guy who wouldn't say boo to a goose and who is like, probably going to be a grade A student.

turns out, it had been one of the third years, I'm not bothered by his name, but who roamed the school and is uncontrollable pretty much and wanders into your class when he wants to.

He's a completely different kid, two years above Desire, really quite difficult to be in the school with him and the school don't quite know what to do with him. Turns out he walked into this boy's class, called him a horrible name, thought he'd just wander in and wander out again and Desire went, no.

[6:31] I have to say, I probably can't tell you how I felt when I heard this because I was like, yeah. Well done, no, I shouldn't know. Violence is not good, okay, we know that.

But a little above you goes, wow, we got to know him on the inside for a second there. This little guy, he wasn't just this little guy. Actually, there is a lot going on in this little guy that he was like, you're not going to treat me like that.

I have to tell you, this third year roams and has not walked as confidently around the building since because the rumor now is he's been taken out by a little first year. You know, they say that if you want to know someone, see them under stress.

Not sure, I want you guys to know me that well sometimes. But if you want to know Jesus, let's look at him under stress and let's look at people looking at him under stress because I think what they discover about him reveals some really both interesting and amazing things about the Son of God and God.

And so that's why we're going through the kind of four really quickly and not very much time because I hope along the way that the Holy Spirit will speak to your hearts and that you will see something afresh of just how amazing and worthy of our praise Jesus is when we see him in this horrific situation on display to the world.

[8:01] Let's look at the first lot, the passers-by. And it said that those who passed by they held insults at him, shaking their heads, saying, well, are you going to save yourself? You were going to destroy the temple and build it in three days.

Come down from the cross, save yourself, and the chief priests were there too, mocking him. He saved others, but he can't save himself. Let this Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross so that we might honest, see and believe.

Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. It's clear what they think. You, Jesus, you threaten the religious system.

And now, how useless are you hanging on this cross? dying the same way as every other crook who threatened the system. Even those dying beside him, mocking him.

Ah, you couldn't do it. Oh, you can't get down and save yourself. this is a moment of seeing this kind of duality here of the powerlessness of Jesus being on a cross held by nails and the powerful Jesus on that cross.

[9:19] Tom Holland, the historian, says, no one had ever imagined a God humbling himself to die a slave's death and one so foul and so humiliating, so utterly vile.

Christianity was founded on this scandal, this offense to all rational thought. It doesn't make sense on the least likely hero of them all. Jesus is powerless here.

Is there a more powerless position? This is a, on a cross on the outskirts of the city being held there where basically you were killed so that people would know to behave themselves.

Held in place by human power. And in fact, this is a kind of culmination, the end of a story of weakness for Jesus, right? Because he's, God himself who then in the incarnation goes through human birth and is subject to human authorities like taxes.

Do you remember when he spoke to Caesar? Sorry, people asked him, should we pay taxes to Caesar? Jesus under human authority. God under human authority with human processes of a dodgy trial, with human injustice of him being sent to the cross so he wouldn't get in the way the same way as loads of other people had been sent to the cross.

[10:44] It wasn't the first. We think of it such an iconic symbol and it is, but it actually was just an everyday way of keeping people under control. Subject to human whipping, human nailing, human watching and mocking, and human breathing as he gasps and dies a very human death.

Jesus on the cross is like it says in Isaiah 53 that he was oppressed and afflicted. He didn't open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, he didn't open his mouth.

On the same day we think that Jesus would have been crucified, temple preparations would have been going on for a huge Jewish festival and you can almost imagine who is referred to as the Lamb of God, Jesus on the cross gasping his last breath as little lambs are being led into the temple courtyard!

to be slaughtered. He is, the Bible talks about him as the Lamb of God. He is the sacrifice once and forever to make us right with God.

Powerful! The God who puts stars into space is there on the cross like a lamb. There's no denying his weakness at this point.

[12:15] And yet there's also this power. We hear in, sorry, John 1 it should say, and the word was with God, talking about Jesus, and the word was God, Jesus. He was with God in the beginning, through him, Jesus, all things were made.

Without him nothing was made that has been made. Nothing exists without him. And here he is allowing himself to be subject to human stuff and human death.

Wow! I want to say, get down Jesus, come on, like those mockers, like come on, you don't have to do this, we know you're God, it's okay, you've got power over everything, why would you do this?

Why are you staying there? But we know that sometimes to be powerless is actually, and to choose to be powerless is to exercise ultimate power.

I remember the scene from the lion, the witch, and the wardrobe where, does anyone remember this film? This is massive for me as a kid. I remember almost crying at this point when you watch Aslan, the great and powerful picture of who God is, being shorn and having his mane removed and all these evil kind of creatures mocking him and tying him and holding him down and killing him.

[13:45] In his powerlessness, Jesus on the cross is the power of God and the plans of God.

Because of that cross and because he chose to subject himself to that horrible death, you and I can know the life of God in us and the love of God in his powerlessness.

He is showing true strength and dies so that he might break death itself and that we might be able to live for him.

His power and powerlessness, they free us to live in both of those places. Most of us have learned we spend our time teaching our kids how powerful they might be.

Ellen loves to, I mean, I find this funny, Ellen always says, I say, hey little Ellen, how are you? He says, I am big Ellen, daddy. I'm big Ellen. And I'm like, well, empirically that's not true, darling, actually, you're not this high.

[14:51] But she's learned. We learn to be powerful and we spend our lives teaching our kids to be powerful, learning about our own power and exercising our own power. And we're not going to be able to lay it aside and that just gives us freedom.

to, yeah, we are powerful and sometimes we don't judge that well and don't use it well. Actually, part of the gospel is being powerless and saying, actually, I can't have it all sorted.

And actually, every one of us one day is going to be powerless ultimately. Every one of us, however full of life and health, however great, or however, you know, you could be the CEO, you could be the richest man in the world, and one day, Elon Musk even, will be on his deathbed and will breathe his last.

What a freedom it is for us who love Jesus to know that we both have power and the power of God at work in us, but also we can be weak and we can need him. And we can, we have both of those in our kind of palette, in our repertoire because we see Jesus, the one who had ultimate power, choose to be weak for us.

And it's tempting, I don't know if you've ever found yourself without power, without the ability to move on through life, finding yourself broken or unable to kind of move forward, but we have a temptation in our kind of ways of being to either kind of pretend it doesn't happen or to make it the whole of us.

[16:32] So I'm thinking particularly of things like when we suffer bereavement, like some bereavements we suffered years ago who are really kind of fresh in my mind again at this time of year. And do you know, we can end up being like, no, it's all absolutely fine.

You know, we may have, something awful may have happened to us, we may be really struggling with it, but no, no, no, it's all right, we just keep going. It's like, you can, it's an option and it's sometimes a really helpful, necessary, helpful and necessary thing.

We can't, when we find ourselves struggling with something, we can't just kind of go, but equally, it's a temptation to kind of keep it to ourselves and away from the Lord. Or the opposite happens, we make our powerlessness and our suffering becomes everything.

Oh, where is me? Oh, me, me, me, me, me. And it's like, I just encourage us if we find ourselves in a place of powerlessness, of struggling to move forward with the Lord, struggling to move forward with something maybe that's going on for us, because it will happen to all of us, however powerful we think we are, however well we fake it, he wants to meet with us when we find ourselves stuck.

He loves to meet with us in our powerlessness. And when we are weak, I think it speaks really loudly to the world around us.

[17:49] Jesus on the cross was not what people were expecting. And yet, we'll see in a few moments, people looked at him and saw God. When your friends often will say, what are you doing on Sunday afternoon?

We'll be like, we're going to church, we love Jesus. Like, oh, that's a funny hobby, isn't it? Like, our weakness of needing him and needing to draw to him and actually our great desire to do that, to be honest, it speaks to people.

Us turning to him when things are rotten and knowing we can pray and he can answer, it really speaks to people. He is a God of great power and we find ourselves needing him.

I think it talks to the world around us. I think it's Jesus' plan for his weakness on the cross and his strength on the cross to be an announcement to the world. So I just encourage you, it's okay to not have it all together and to be weak.

He uses that, I'm sure of it. Okay, let's look at some other people. Let's look at the bystanders. So here we are in Mark 15, 35.

[18:58] When some of those standing near heard this, they said, when he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? They said, listen, he's calling Elijah. He filled the sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, offered it to Jesus to drink.

Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes down, comes to take him down, he said. And with a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

Elijah was traditionally called on when people were in distress. If you're a Jewish person in distress, you might call on Elijah because he didn't die but went to be with the Lord.

And there was this kind of sense of Elijah will help. Feels a bit like the odd job man to be honest, but this sense of you call on him. And there were some prophecies that seemed to say that when the Messiah comes, he would be there in some way.

So these guys are kind of faithfully bystanders saying, well, let's see if it happens, shall we? Because if he's really the Messiah, well, he'll call Elijah, Elijah will come and it'll be fine. He'll take him down.

[20:03] And very quickly they get their answer. With a loud cry, he breathed his last. I wonder. It sounds to me like this is a question of connection.

Are you connected, Jesus? They're looking at him saying, well, they've said you can't do it. You're not good enough. You're not strong enough. You were going to take the temple down but you failed. These guys are saying, maybe he hasn't.

Maybe, maybe he's actually got connections. Maybe Elijah's going to pitch up and sort it out. Are you connected, Jesus? Jesus? Well, they get their answer.

It would look like the answer is no. On the cross, we see this great exchange happen. He, Jesus, became sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

What an amazing idea that Jesus, actually the one who is right with God, dies on the cross so that we who, by our own nature, aren't right with God get to be seen as righteous and friends with God.

[21:15] It's a moment where we have the song, don't we? The Father turns his face away. In this moment, this, I believe, is a moment of deep disconnection between Father and Son.

the Trinity didn't really, well, didn't have death in it until the incarnation. In perfection, eternal life, living together Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and in this moment on the cross when Jesus dies, there is now a history of death in the Trinity, a moment of death in the being of God because he became sin and died.

I imagine the Father was looking away, even him in horror of what was going on. when Jesus cries, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

There's two things going on. I think there's a raw reality of being on the cross. There is also, he's pointing out what's going on at the same time, that this moment in history is a deep connection of Father and Son and the mission of God because it's what they've been living for is that God might be announced to us and through Jesus' death we might live for him and be right with him and Psalm 22, verse 1 is those very words, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It's the beginning of that Psalm which is, I haven't got time to look at it today but it's absolutely stuffed full of all the stuff that happens to Jesus. It's like a prophetic song of what's going to happen to Jesus. It's got the vinegar in it, it's got the mocking in it, it's got all of the different, loads of the different elements that we've just read about are all there in Psalm 22.

[23:10] So as well as a deep cry of anguish it's actually also Jesus saying don't miss this, this is my father, dad and me, this is the plan together.

You don't need Elijah to turn up to see that Jesus has got connections, his final words were pointing out to you, this is the plan because he's so deeply connected with what God's, all of his, father God is all about.

Psalm 22, 22 says, I will declare your name. So it starts with why have you forsaken me? And it ends with I will declare your name to my people.

I will, in the assembly I will praise you. They will come and will declare his righteousness to a people yet unborn that he has done it. It's like this, just this stuff with prophetic goodness pointing out that this death on the cross was, was a divine plan for Jesus to be deeply disconnected in that moment with his father because he's on mission with his dad to let you and I know him and live for him.

It's both and, just changing tack quite suddenly but have you ever seen people not get Wi-Fi before?

[24:42] I know it's quite a jarring jump but if you're a high school teacher when kids can't get data it's like a, I don't know, an alien invasion has happened. There's like, oh no and you find people or you might see it in public places people wandering around looking for a connection and being like, oh have you ever done this?

I've done this. Get on a hill walk somewhere and be like, oh I've taken a great picture I'll just message it to my wife. Oh no, I can't get a connection. And you find yourself wandering precariously close to the edge of a cliff because you're seeking like a kind of, I iust want to send this quick message.

This is a moment on the cross of not, not just to these observers saying has he got connections? Will he be saved? It's a moment of Jesus showing I'm so connected with my father that I can be cut off and forsaken in him to rescue everyone.

I don't know about you, I wonder sometimes if our connectedness when our wifi or our data doesn't work seems like a much bigger deal than whether or not we're connected with the Lord.

and I say that to myself as well as to you that so many everyday inconsequential things end up mattering much more than just the awesomeness of living with him and in connection with him.

[26:16] that living with him and in connection with him took Jesus to the cross that's how utterly vital it is and I just wonder do we know that?

Because I know on a good day I do and I know there are many small things that become so much more important than a life of connection with him.

he is ever present much more reliably than Elijah to come in and help us and be with us and we need to be a people who sense whether we're with him and whether we are in good relationship with him and whether we're living with an awareness of God in our life because he is he's designed us to experience a sense of connection and relationship with him not just here not just a couple of times a week but in an ongoing basis and while being kind of unaware of him is inevitable with the busyness of life and with the journey of life with God it should be noticeable and temporary I just want to just want to give us that vision of continuing to grow as being a people who practice connecting with him and living with life in the spirit with an awareness of God at work with us and in our life we see a divine connection the connection with his father took Jesus to the cross and had him endure the cross and raised him from the dead ultimately how vital is it that we are in good relationship with the Lord first time when we first get to know him but then day by day moment by moment okay we're going to do these last two really fast so two more to talk to you about one is this guy here the centurion it is one verse

I love this verse when the centurion who stood there in front of Jesus saw how he died he said surely this man was the son of God and do you know what we crucify Romans crucify people because they're a threat to the Roman Empire and that is what is going on here I wonder for this guy though turned up basically to do his job right probably put on his armor in the morning turned up at the cross another criminal to crucify just what he does and he then watches Jesus die just like every other person he's been there to see die and this one gets past his armor this one I've called it subvert is the word I've used it subverts his kind of just doing my job mentality Jesus dies in this moment as a subversive criminal and he's killed because he's not they say we know it's a bit of a fix up but because he subverted the rules but we also then see he gets under the skin of the centurion and subvert means to attack from under he gets this guy's heart in the moment of his death it says when he saw how he died he said surely he's the son of

God and we know with the benefit of history we can see that actually they kill him to try and get rid of him and in fact Jesus ends up transforming the whole empire because by I think is it five years or some very close by later I forgot my stats in the moment we see kind of ruler of the Roman empire become a Christian and start saying actually everyone needs to trust Jesus by the way because he's really really good that is nuts if you think someone dies and not just reaches into the centurion's life but in fact reaches into the whole empire and ultimately we know three days later we see that he defeats death itself so I think another thing we see here in this centurion is Jesus as someone who's subversive who challenges everything really there because he wants to be our savior he is

Jesus who doesn't leave us in our armor but he gets behind the stuff that we put in the way and he changes our hearts just like he's done with that centurion I want to encourage you your life and my life in Jesus as people even if we've been following him for years is one of letting him behind our armor!

Jesus you're good but I'm doing right he wants to get right in there and he wants more and more of your heart and he wants to get every other authority that we allow to be a big deal, subject to him.

His plans, they're vital for us. And I just want to encourage you, allow him to do that. And even today, I hope as you've worshipped and heard the scriptures, you sense him challenge you and go, yeah, actually, you're in Jesus.

I want you to be more than the stuff I put in your way. And the other thing is, expect him to work in places and ways you might not choose. I love when I hear a story of someone who just chats with a friend and says, yeah, I follow Jesus.

And they go, tell me about that. And I know of ones we've had as a community in recent months of people just not being able to keep their life away from his goodness.

[32:19] Actually, sometimes, however hard they try. Okay, I said it'd be fast, so we're going to move on really quickly. I want us to look at the women, finally. Some women who are 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 him, cared for his needs. And many other women who'd come up to Jerusalem were also there. Can you imagine what it would be like to be one of these women?

They have followed him, they have cared for his needs, and then they are there watching him be torn apart and publicly shamed. I imagine there was grief and fear and confusion of watching a loved one tortured and killed and trying to stand by.

In this moment I've called of both honour, where they're like, we will honour him, we will stick with him, and this moment of deep horror. They probably wouldn't have been allowed nearer the cross.

They were at a bit of a distance, because people would be like, why would you watch someone die, especially a criminal? But they stayed. They stayed and they watched, and they saw what was going on with him.

[33:43] I'm going to put a picture up briefly of this, but the Passion of the Christ, which was big, but it must be 20 years ago now, I think is one of the most awfully graphic representations of Jesus on the cross, but does capture the horror of what they will have seen.

And I think it's amazing that these women stand there in their unwavering commitment to him. They want to stick with him, even in his darkest hours, and be with him, even if they can't tend directly for his needs.

I think they call us to be like them in investing to be present with people in suffering, and that's being present to people when we suffer.

I can only imagine what it's like. It'd be so tempting for them to be like, I'm not going to face this. I'm just going to go. But they chose to be as close to God in flesh and blood as they could be at a horrifying moment.

But they also speak to us of this need to be present with each other when we're suffering and when other people are suffering. It's really inspiring to watch them there. I think they can do it because they've been present with him before this suffering.

[35:06] And there's a call there to us of being a people who, we don't know what the future holds. We don't know what is ahead of us and what the future of life will look like.

We do know that he is good and he is good for us and that he's called us to follow him. And they're a picture of what it looks like to be present with him before we suffer as well.

Because if we go on and see who was there, what we will see is, this is my favorite person from this scene. It's Mary Magdalene. You find her in Luke 8. And it says, Mary, from whom seven demons had come out, these women were helping, and it talks about her following Jesus.

And then it says, these women were helping to support them out of their own means. Mary was someone who was completely lost. When it talks about seven demons, it's talking about the perfect number. It's like a shorthand in scripture, both for perfect, which is not quite what it's saying here, and total, like absolute.

So when it says in scripture that seven demons were cast out of this woman, it's saying like, there's no space for anyone else. This is, she was done, totally full of just demon stuff.

[36:19] So she was totally lost. And then Jesus steps in, and you can read it yourself in Luke 8, and she is, she's healed. And she, she's, she's made well. And from completely lost to healed, and then, I've continued with this complete, because I think the seven is really significant.

She is totally present with him in his life. She's one of the women, it says there, who ministered to him, and who cared for his needs. And she was surrendered to his purposes.

We can be sure of that, because it says, basically, Jesus had her wallet. That's a good sign. The joke is supposed to be, what's the last thing in a Christian that Jesus converts?

It's your wallet. Okay? She is giving to him, and supporting him out of her own means. Mary is one of those people, who during his life, before we get to the cross, she knows, I was sunk without him.

He saved me. And now, through thick and thin, I am going nowhere. Here we see, in these stories, the powerless, powerful, subversive, saving, honorable, horrifying, death of Jesus.

[37:41] And he's saying, come, follow me. And what I think, Mary, the reason I'm finishing on Mary, is I think it's, it's so good to see, that she is someone, who is lasting the distance with him, and then actually goes on to see him, resurrected.

And, and how is that? Because she spent, her life, following him. I imagine, if we were thinking, who do we want to be, watching what goes on for Jesus?

We want to be, like her, and like those women, with him, whatever happens, with him, when we find things around us, awful, with him, when people are not treating him, as they should, with him, as he does his mission, in the world, to reveal God, to the world, who needs him.

Our job, is to know him fully, and I hope some of those verses, have helped us with that. And as we, spend our time, getting to know him, we can last a distance with him, a life of faith.

The practical thing for this, really is, is, I've given us some points, along the way, but the stuff that really, stood out for me, is what we've been looking at, in small group recently, this idea, of being with Jesus, and making time, to be like those women, still with him, whatever goes on, and to keep looking at him, and what they call, what we're calling, apprentice under him, that is only possible, and the one thing, we need to do, in light of all of this, is be a people, who keep leaving space, for him in our lives, who keep letting him, get past the stuff, we put in the way, who keep letting him, into the moments, where we could be, really powerful, or really powerless, who let him in, when we're suffering, and when we're struggling, and who seek him, as the one we need, connection from, who we're just, we need him, we need him, connection with him, over all else, I've just noticed the time, and I'm really sorry, to have kept our kids workers, so long, but I hope you find it helpful, to look at these guys, let me pray for us, and then we'll go, and grab some coffee,

Father, we, see Jesus, on the cross, and, oh, how, how, awful, and amazing, that moment was, we want to be people, who know you fully, and continue, to get to know you, and to last the distance, of the life of faith, with you, help us, love you well, and connect with you well, and allow you, into every part, of the life, of, all our lives, with you, we are humbled, by what you've done, to announce your goodness, to us, help us, love you more, and more, and leave space for you, Lord, Amen, Amen.

Thank you.