

Good Friday: Crown Him King of Kings

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Date: 18 April 2025

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. As we prepare our hearts this morning, I'm going to read a short poem, which! I hope will aid us in our reflections this morning. After that, I will lead us in prayer.
- And once we have said Amen together, we will hear from God's Word. Father, Forgive, by Malcolm Gutte.
- Father, forgive. And so forgiveness flows. Flows from the very wound our hatred makes. Flows through the taunts, the curses and the blows. Flows through our wasted world, a healing spring. Welding and cleansing, washing all the marks away, the scars and scars of every wrong. Forgiveness flows to where we need it most, right in the pit and smithy of our sin, just where the dreadful nails are driven in, just where our woundedness has done its worst.
- We know your cry of pain should be a curse. Yet turn to you and find we have been blessed. We know not what we do, but heaven knows, for every sin on earth, forgiveness flows.
- Let's pray. Gracious Father, we come before you today standing in the shadow of the cross, standing in the place of sorrow, standing in the place of silence, and yet also standing in the place of hope, standing in the place of assurance. For we remember today with fear and trembling, and with wonder and awe the suffering and death of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- [2 : 0 3] He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and by his wounds we are healed. We confess to you, our Lord and Savior, that too often we have forgotten and doubted you.
- We have betrayed and denied you. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have turned away, chosen comfort over sacrifice, pride over humility, self over you.
- When we see injustice in the world, we often stand by. We turn our backs. We ignore the cries of others. We fail to proclaim your good news.
- We fail to live out your teachings or to love our neighbor as ourselves. Forgive us, Lord, not because we deserve it, but because Jesus bore the weight of our sin and stood in our place.
- On this day, remind us again that the cross is not just a tragic end, but the very center of your plan to rescue and redeem.
- [3 : 1 5] Help us not to pass by quickly, but let us sit for a while to see the depths of your love and the cost of forgiveness, the grace we too often take for granted.
- And today we ask that we may be shaped more and more by the cross we preach. Keep us faithful to Christ crucified, even when the world caused it foolishness.
- And Father, we pray for those carrying heavy hearts today, those mourning loved ones, struggling with illness, or just weighed down by life.
- May Jesus, who knows what it is like to suffer, be their comfort. May his scars speak healing, and his atoning death bring reassurance to their souls.

And as we prepare now to hear your word today, we ask for the sword of the Spirit to do its work. Cut us where we need to be cut, and then bring light and fire where we need it most.

[4 : 23] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Now, I don't know much about art, but this week I stumbled across this painting that's on the screen by a 19th century artist called Francis Dixie.

I'm just waiting at this on the screen. And it's called The Symbol, and it's regarded as one of his finest works. Have a close look. Now, what is going on?

There's a group of young men and women strolling through an archway of some Italian town. They are looking carefree, and if you look carefully, someone at the back is actually carrying an instrument, hinting that they are fresh from a party.

But as they go their way, they pass by an old man, sitting quietly by the side, holding up a crucifix for sale. And for one fleeting moment, it attracts the gaze of a young man.

Now, one thing I haven't told you yet is the inscription that accompanies the original painting. Next to the title are these words from Lamentations 1, verse 12.

[5 : 34] Is it nothing to you or ye that pass by? You see, Dixie didn't just paint a scene.

He painted a question. He's asking us, how often are we like these revelers, caught up in life's pleasures or distractions, passing by the cross without a second glance?

Again, I don't know anything about art, but the art critics tell me that the picture is painted in such a way that your attention is drawn to everything but the cross in the old man's hand, whether that is the lady reaching for the orange or the person pulling at their necklace.

Your eyes look at everything but the cross. And doesn't that still ring true in a social media age like ours? But every once in a while, something like an old man's gesture or a public holiday in the calendar brings our gaze back to the cross.

And the question is posed. Is the cross nothing to you or ye that pass by? Or does it stir something in you?

[6 : 55] If so, what? What response does the cross actually draw from you? And why does it matter? And that's where Luke takes us in our passage today.

As he walks us through the crucifixion, he introduces us to a cast of characters, each responding to Jesus in their own way. And as we watch them, we are invited to consider, who are we?

Where do we fit? Because the response we make will have eternal consequences. So let us explore today the different responses we might have to the cross.

And we'll begin by considering a common response. Indifference. Let's head straight to the crucifixion scene in verse 32.

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skow, they crucified him there, along with the criminals, one on his right, the other on his left.

[8 : 03] Crucifixion, of course, was one of the most humiliating and torturous methods of execution possible. It was meant to be a public spectacle, often performed on busy roads to maximize deterrence.

Once you were crucified, death came slowly, taking hours or even days. That's because you didn't die immediately from being hung on a cross.

Instead, your chest muscles and your diaphragm gradually became weakened, making each breath more and more labored. Alongside that, you also have to contend with dehydration and exhaustion, and that is what eventually kills you off.

No wonder the Roman philosopher Seneca wrote this. Would any human being willingly choose to be fastened to that cursed tree, especially after the beating that left him deathly weak, deformed, swelling with vicious welts on shoulders and chest, and struggling to draw every last agonizing breath?

Anyone facing such a death would plead to die rather than mount the cross. deathly weak of the people But how did some people take in such a horrific event?

[9 : 29] Look at the beginning of verse 35. The people stood watching. It's almost as if they were just watching a concert of some sort. It was simply to them a spectator sport.

Or take the soldiers in verse 34. While a dying man was gasping for air, they were casting lots without a care, for their only concern was having new clothes to wear.

How incredible is that? And yet the truth is, we human beings are indeed capable of such unsettling indifference.

about half a century ago, the philosopher Hannah Arendt reflected on some of the atrocities associated with the Nazis.

She was especially interested in Adolf Eichmann, a key Nazi bureaucrat who orchestrated the practical logistics of the Holocaust, from organizing mass deportations to managing the schedule of trains that ferried millions of Jews to concentration camps.

[10 : 45] Arendt marveled at how an ordinary man could facilitate such immense evil. You see, by not even stopping to think about the right or wrong of what he was doing, Eichmann became numb to the human cause.

Just like the soldiers who got so used to the routine that a brutal crucifixion became nothing more than just a chance to grab some new clothes.

So, if the human heart is capable of such profound indifference, then naturally, we need to ask, is that how I respond to the cross as well?

after all, what is the cross? Only the most wicked act in human history. It is where humankind conspired to kill their very maker.

And yet, does the very thought of our creator dying on the cross leave us simply shrugging our shoulders and saying, hmm, okay, that's no big deal.

[12 : 07] Or to come at it from another angle, how do you fundamentally regard the cross? Has it simply become reduced to becoming a piece of jewelry for you? Is it simply something you wear to signal your cultural identity?

Is the cross simply an inspirational symbol or a good luck charm rather than the means of atonement or a call to transformation?

Like the soldiers, have you become desensitized to it, choosing instead to devote much of your hearts and your minds to chasing gain in this world?

If so, that is when you know you might have become indifferent to the cross. But you know what? Luke is really clever because by showing us this act of indifference, he is also telling us at the very same time, don't be indifferent.

How so? Because the gambling going on isn't just about how apathetic the soldiers were, it's also about the fulfillment of Scripture.

[13 : 23] You see, back in Psalm 22, we read about an innocent, suffering king who is completely at the mercy of his enemies as they divide up his clothes and cast lots for them.

And now here in Luke, we realize the psalmist is painting a prophetic picture. And that means what's happening here is not random, it is all part of God's plan.

And if what's happening here is God's plan unfolding, then the cross cannot be met with indifference.

Especially when we realize that Psalm 22 doesn't end with the king defeated, but with the king restored. It's almost as if Luke is quietly telling us, hey, you know the one suffering now on the cross?

he's the king, the king of kings in fact. And one day, Psalm 22 tells us that king is going to be restored to his throne. Every knee will bow to him, including yours.

[14 : 32] So whatever you make of him now, just know this, you won't be able to ignore him forever. Make sure you understand what's happening on the cross. Don't be indifferent.

So we've examined one possible response, but how else might we respond? We turn now to a second possibility, pity.

Let's return to verse 27. As Jesus is being led to the cross, we are told a large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wept for him.

And you can understand why. After all, here is an innocent man being sent to his death. Surely that would arouse anyone's sympathy, right?

And certainly in my experience, some Good Friday services go out of their way to evoke lots of pity. You know, the hymns are sentimental and the musical arrangements tug at our heartstrings, trying to get us to feel as sorry for Jesus as possible.

[15 : 49] The movie The Passion of the Christ, released 20 or so years ago, does a similar thing. I remember watching it in the cinema with a few friends, and there is one scene found nowhere in the Bible, where Jesus is beaten with rods, and the captain calls a halt to the beatings, apparently thinking Jesus has been beaten enough.

But then Jesus struggles back to his feet, clearly defying his tormentors and daring them to beat him further, which they do.

And clearly what the movie is looking to do is to intensify the depiction of physical agony, until we, the audience, are simply overwhelmed, pitying him for all the pain he endures.

But is that the response God is really after? After all, consider how Luke describes the crucifixion in verse 32. They crucified him there.

That's it. Just for words. No elaborate details of nails being driven into his hands or blood being shed or anything of that sort. So clearly the physical pain isn't the point.

[17 : 16] Yes, Jesus did suffer physically, but Luke doesn't dwell on it. Because pity is not what God is looking for. And we can be sure of this because Jesus also tells us explicitly.

Look at verse 28. Jesus turned and said to them, daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children.

Why? Because Jesus tells us the days that are coming are so terrible, it will be considered a blessing to be childless since at least you won't have to watch your children suffer.

Indeed, it is going to be so bad, verse 30, that people are going to cry out for the mountains and the hills to fall on them and cover them. It seems at first glance as if Jesus is referring to the coming siege of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans, a time which saw children die of starvation and in at least one instance a mother becoming a cannibal out of desperation.

So, if you want to have pity, better to pity yourselves. And certainly Jesus is referring in part to AD 70, but it seems as if he has an even bigger picture in mind.

[18 : 52] You see, in verse 30, Jesus is actually quoting Hosea chapter 10 verse 8, a verse where Hosea recalls Israel's panic response when the Assyrians conquered them centuries earlier.

And later on in the book of Revelation, John also draws on this image from Hosea, except this time he doesn't apply it simply to AD 70.

Instead, he applies it to the day of judgment itself, when God's wrath will be fully revealed. And so when Jesus quotes Hosea, it's actually also to warn of God's ultimate judgment beyond just Jerusalem's fall.

And that is why Jesus says if you must weep, then make sure it's to weep over your sin. Because if you don't, then the faith in store for you will make crucifixion seem mild by comparison.

That seems to be the point of verse 31. If you are not weeping over your sin, then you too will cry out like Israel in Hosea.

[20 : 14] Wow! These are pretty strong words. Especially given that it's coming from someone who is on death row. But why does Jesus say such a thing in such blunt terms?

Because he wants to make clear merely pitying him will do us no good on that final day. But if we seek refuge in him instead, now that is a different story.

For it is still not too late. Jesus is saying that day has not yet arrived. If you weep your tears of repentance now, you will not have to weep any tears of despair on that final day.

Or as the Old Testament theologian Chris Wright puts it, either we will find shelter in the cross where Jesus bore God's judgment for us, or we will find no shelter from the judgment of God when we stand before him.

So, the point isn't to come to Good Friday to simply say, oh, poor Jesus, and leave it at that. For pity might move us, but repentance actually saves us.

[21 : 39] but what other responses might people still bring to the cross? Let's now consider a third one, mockery.

As we continue our walk through the crucifixion, Luke now draws our attention to three groups of people, all of whom have very little in common with one another. But what they all do is mock the very one on the cross.

I look at the first group, the religious leaders, verse 35. The rulers even sneered at him. They said, he saved others, let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one.

Their mockery is a flat-out rejection of Jesus' Messiahship. Really? That guy, they scoff, hanging there, bleeding, helpless.

And yet, even in their mockery, they unwittingly speak the truth, even as they deny it. He is God's Messiah, saving others.

[22 : 57] How ironic. And then we move on to the second group, the soldiers, verse 36. They also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

And this time, this group scoffed at any suggestion that this man possesses any political power. But once again, witness the irony.

the sign above his head, king of the Jews. Well, that declares exactly who Jesus is, doesn't it? He's the sovereign over every realm.

And then we move on to the third group, an individual really. That's one of the criminals, verse 39. And as he hung alongside Jesus, he hurled insults at him.

Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us. This is the ultimate humiliation. Jesus is mocked by a man who actually deserves his punishment and yet still dares the only innocent man present to prove his supposed power.

[24 : 15] Go ahead, he says. I knew this amazing saviour who can free us all. Prove it. But here is the thing.

In each case, the mockery masks a terrifying truth. The very identity these scoffers reject is exactly who Jesus is.

And it also highlights another astounding truth. the lengths to which Jesus will go to accomplish his mission. You see, did you notice that all three groups of mockers say something similar?

If you're the Messiah, save yourself. If you're the king, save yourself, save yourself, and you can save us.

And of course, that would have been very tempting for Jesus to do, wouldn't it? And perhaps Satan, just as he did in the wilderness, back in Luke chapter 4, is tempting Jesus yet again.

[25 : 28] Certainly, the three-fold repetition invites us to consider both scenes in parallel. After all, back in the temptation scene, Satan operated in the same way.

If you are the son of God, Jesus, then turn the stones into bread. Or throw yourself off the highest point so that the angels can catch you. Fit our expectations of what the Messiah is like.

But here is the thing. Jesus knows the truth. if he saves himself, he cannot save others.

And if he is to save others, if he is to save you and me, he must not save himself.

He must stay there on the cross. And brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ chose, to stay on the cross.

[26 : 37] That takes incredible strength, doesn't it? He stayed on the cross until, verse 46, he called out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

And with that, he breathed his last. He died on the cross. He did what he said he would do. Drink the cup of wrath, that wasn't his to take.

He took the punishment we deserve in our place. He really was the Messiah, the king of the Jews, the chosen one, everything the people mocked him for.

And yet, he received their mockery willingly, so that we could one day stand unashamed before God.

And if that is true, when we look at the cross, we cannot respond with indifference or pity and certainly not mockery.

[27 : 48] Instead, we must respond with humility, with humility. humility. You see, there is not just one criminal, but two who are hung alongside Jesus.

And actually, they are very similar. Both are guilty, verse 41, and indeed, both are suffering the same punishment. As the second criminal says, we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

And both of them can see Jesus, and can see him identified as the king of the Jews, verse 38. They are similar.

But both do not respond to him in the same way. We've already seen one of them respond with mockery, but what about the other criminal? Let's have a look.

Notice the first words out of his mouth, verse 40. Don't you fear God. You see, here's what this criminal knows.

[28 : 59] God is real, and he's in charge. We don't get to debate endlessly with him. We submit to him. Now, the criminal who mock Jesus, I think, also does believe in God.

But his idea of God is of someone who can do him a favor. His idea of God is someone whom you can bargain with. God, if you prove yourself and save me from this problem, then maybe I'll go with you.

But actually, he is still the one setting the terms. Quite amazing, isn't it, even when he's hanging there on the cross. But that is how so often we can treat God, can't we?

God, if you save me from my work crisis, or my relationship crisis, or my health crisis, then maybe we can talk. We dictate the terms to God.

But the proper response to the cross starts by us acknowledging that God is God and we are not. We don't come to him with a list of demands, the way the first criminal does.

[30 : 09] Instead, we must come in repentance. We must admit and confess we are sinful and deserving of punishment.

Again, that's what the thief, the criminal did in verse 41, didn't he? As another translation puts it, we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.

You see, this criminal didn't try to plead innocence. He didn't try to justify himself before God. Oh, God, you know, actually, deep down, I am a very good person.

In fact, he didn't even ask to be saved from death. He accepted that his punishment was just. But he acknowledges Jesus.

Look at verse 41 again. This man has done nothing wrong. That wasn't the concern of the first criminal. Who cares who this Jesus is, whether he's guilty or not?

[31 : 12] He only matters as long as he can get me out of my predicament. But no, this second criminal confesses the righteousness of Jesus and actually he acknowledges the kinship of Jesus as well.

Verse 42, he assumes Jesus has a kingdom. him. But there is one more step this criminal takes.

He doesn't just admit his wrongdoing. He doesn't just assume and acknowledge Jesus' kingship. But he also asks Jesus to remember him.

Verse 42. In other words, he throws himself at the feet of Jesus. He throws himself at this man in the middle hanging on the cross and trust that this worn down, beaten up, crucified man can save him.

Remember this man has no track record of his own to stand on. You know, sometimes we might romanticize the second criminal. But in all likelihood, this guy probably isn't someone we want to hang out with or whom we want our children to ever meet.

[32 : 32] Because he is a bad guy. But in humility, he now puts his complete trust in Jesus that this man might be his savior.

And that is the response Jesus is looking for us. A response of deep humility. Just like this criminal. A response that recognizes we are great sinners.

sinners. And yet Jesus can be our great savior. And we can respond this way because Luke records two things Jesus says on the cross itself.

One is a prayer and the other a promise. Let's look at the prayer first. Come back with me to verse 34 where Jesus is being crucified.

And as that is happening, this is what Jesus says. Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. And my friends, don't gloss over those words.

[33 : 40] They are simply amazing, aren't they? After all, if we were in Jesus' place, would we not want with all our might to scream silent curses at all these enemies of ours?

In fact, we might even say we are justified in doing so since didn't the psalmist in the Old Testament often call on God to bring judgment on God's enemies? But as Jesus hung on the cross in agony, his concern was for the souls of his tormentors.

And so Jesus seeing that they were heaping up condemnation for themselves, prayed for their forgiveness. He practiced what he preached.

He loved his enemies. And my brothers and sisters, once again, that is why Jesus stayed on the cross, so that this prayer of his could be answered.

again, to quote Chris Wright, Jesus prayed that they could be forgiven and Jesus died so they could be forgiven.

[35 : 03] And that is precisely why Jesus can say those words in verse 43 to the second criminal. truly I tell you, the day you'll be with me in paradise.

That is the promise Jesus makes. Because I died, Jesus says, you can have rest and refreshment instead of condemnation and punishment.

Notice how wonderful this promise is. it is certain, truly I tell you. It is immediate, today, and it is personal.

You will be with me. And it is a promise you can claim if you do all that the second criminal did and respond with humility and trust in Jesus.

And when you do that, that response of humility and trust will give way to gratitude and awe. The description of verses 44 and 45 sounds dark at first, and indeed it became literally dark.

[36 : 21] It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. But it is not a dark picture.

because of what happened at the end of verse 45. The curtain of the temple was torn into. And that means atonement is complete, access to God is open, the new covenant is ratified, the physical temple is no longer needed.

And all we can do is to echo the centurion of verse 47 and say, praise God. So my friends, as we stand before the cross today, let us hear the question again from Dixie's painting.

Is it nothing to you or ye that pass by? I certainly hope not. For Luke has shown us today that indifference, pity, and mockery most definitely just wouldn't do.

Instead, we are to come with deep humility, confessing our sin, and trusting in Jesus, the King who stayed on the cross for us.

[37 : 49] and in doing so, we find refuge, receive the promise of paradise, and join with the centurion in acknowledging, surely, this was the Son of God.

And as we do, let us look to one more character. Let us follow Simon from Cyrene in verse 26, who carried his cross.

And I think Luke includes this little detail because as we watch him do so, we are meant to say, that's what I want to do too.

Because Jesus wore the crown of thorns for me, I now crown him King of Kings over my life. And so I will carry the cross he gives me.

So let us leave here with gratitude and all ready to live lives that proclaim the cross is everything to me.

[38 : 58] So let me just invite the musicians to come back now on the stage. And while they are coming up here, I would like to invite all of us just to have a moment of silence. Think about what you have heard from God's word and then respond to him personally in prayer.

say to him what you need to say. And after that moment of silence, I will invite the musicians to lead us in our final song.

Let's have that moment of silence now. and then and and and and and and and!