

Why Did Jesus Have To Die?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 March 2024

Preacher: Phil Pickett

- [0 : 0 0] Well, if you could turn now to John chapter 18, John chapter 18, we're going to read verses 1 to 27. Jesus has just prayed his high priestly prayer that we looked at last week.
- And now verse 18 verse 1, when Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Brook Kidron where there was a garden which he and his disciples entered.
- Now Judas who betrayed him also knew this place for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests in the Pharisees went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.
- Then Jesus knowing all that would happen to him came forward and said to them, whom do you seek? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he. Judas who betrayed him was standing with them.
- When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them and again, whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he. So if you seek me, let these men go.
- [1 : 1 1] This was to fulfill the word he had spoken of those whom you have given me. I have lost not one. Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it and struck the high priest servant and cut off his right ear.
- The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, put your sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup that the father has given me? So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.
- First they led him to Annas for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.
- Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple. Since the disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood outside at the door.
- So the other disciple who was known to the high priest went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, you also are not one of this man's disciples are you?
- [2 : 1 3] He said I am not. Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them standing and warming himself.
- The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, I've spoken openly to the world. I've always taught in the synagogues and in the temple where all the Jews come together.
- I've said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. They know what I said. When he had said these things one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand saying is this how you answer the high priest?

Jesus answered him. If I said what I said is wrong bear witness about the wrong. But if what I said is right, why do you strike me? Anastas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him you are not one of this his disciples are you? He denied it and said I am not. One of the servants of the high priest the relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off asked did I not see you in the garden with him?

[3 : 21] Peter again denied it and at once the cock crowed. Well this evening we're considering a question that takes us to the heart of Christianity and that is the question why did Jesus die?

Jesus death is central to Christianity. The chances even if you or one of your friends don't know much about Christianity don't know much about Jesus. The chances is that you might associate it with a cross and you wouldn't be alone.

If archaeologists are looking for evidence of a church somewhere and they're looking back through hundreds or thousands of years of rubble. One of the key things they look for to tell if a building was used as a place of Christian place of worship.

They look for a cross whether that's inscribed and scratched or carved into stone. Whether that's found in the floor plan of a building or maybe that's even a cross painted on one of the walls.

You see from for almost 2000 years the cross has been the symbol has been associated with Christianity and Jesus.

[4 : 33] In other words the death of Jesus Christ stands at the heart of Christianity and it always has and that's we shouldn't be surprised about that. It's no surprise either that for 2000 years Christians haven't discarded the cross and chosen a different symbol.

Maybe something that people find less offensive. The reason they haven't is because the cross is not only central to Jesus as well.

We've seen that as we've worked our way through John's Gospel already but we see that especially as we get to chapter 18. One of the key time markers through John's Gospel is when Jesus talks about his hour.

For the first half of John's Gospel he keeps saying my hour has not yet come. Three years of Jesus' ministry he's saying my hour has not yet come but then in chapters 12 time begins to slow down.

As Jesus says my hour has come. These final chapters are all taking place in this week of Passover that leads up to Jesus' death.

[5 : 38] The time when he says his hour has come, the hour of his death has come. The cross is central to Jesus, it's central to John's Gospel but why?

Why is the cross so important? Why is it so important that Jesus died? This question is foundational. It's foundational if you want to examine the claims of Christianity.

You need to wrestle with it. If you want to work out well who on earth is Jesus? Why on earth did he come to this world? What on earth is Christianity all about?

It's a question you have to wrestle with if you want to examine Christianity. It's also a foundation that we need to keep coming back to as Christians. If we're going to build our lives on Jesus, if we want to grow in trusting in him, we have to keep coming back to this simple question. Why did Jesus die?

Well there's a lot more than we can say in just half an hour. John does tell us three important things in this passage and I've got one word if that helps for each point, if that helps to make them more memorable.

[6 : 45] First of all, why did Jesus die? It was voluntary. Jesus died because he chose to die. Almost all modern scholars, many of whom are not Christians, agree that Jesus was a real person who really did die. That the death of Jesus is a historical fact.

And as well as the four gospels that record Jesus' death, there's secular writers such as Josephus and Tacitus who record this. So the death, the historical death of Jesus is undeniable.

But from a historical perspective, it's quite easy to answer the question, why did Jesus die? Well you can say, well he was betrayed by Judas. The crowds were banging for his blood. The priests and the religious leaders made some trumped up charges.

Pilate and Herod kind of washed their hands of him, didn't want anything to do with him. And the Roman soldiers with quick efficiency executed him on a cross.

As the apostle Peter summarizes in Acts 2, Jesus was crucified by the hands of lawless men. But that's only half the picture. There's another angle because Peter goes on in Acts chapter 2 to say that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. In other words, while Jesus was killed by people, his death wasn't an accident. It was according to God's plan and it was Jesus' choice to go to the cross.

[8 : 15] And we see this really clearly over the next few chapters, but even just especially in these first 11 verses of chapter 18. At first glance it might look like our crafty Judas has got a great plan.

He's caught Jesus out. He knows that Jesus is going to go to this garden he often goes to and Jesus is going to be in the dark, he's going to be away from the crowds. It's going to be easier to catch him by surprise and to grab him and to arrest him without any bother from the crowds. Who knows what's going to happen there?

And then Jesus will be caught. He can hand him over to the chief priest. Judas, clever Judas, he's got it all figured out. But the opposite's true. It doesn't catch Jesus by surprise. Jesus knows everything. Back in chapter 13, Jesus predicted that Judas was going to betray him and I wonder the surprise on Judas' face when Jesus said, one of you is going to betray me, then gave Judas the piece of bread and then sent him out into the night.

Judas continued on with his plan to betray Jesus though, but even when Judas and the soldiers come to Jesus, we see that Jesus is still the one who is in control, who takes the initiative. Do you notice Jesus is the one who says, whom do you seek? They answer him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the one who presses them and says, I am he. Again and again, Jesus is like Jesus is leading the interrogation. He doesn't hide back in the shadows. He comes forward into the torchlight.

He presents himself to them for them to arrest him. Not only is Jesus in the know, he's the one with the power and authority. And what you mentioned, he leads the conversation.

[10 : 01] But also notice when Jesus, when they say we're seeking Jesus of Nazareth, he replies by saying, I am he. And at that moment, they all fall back and soldiers fall to the ground.

And we might think that's strange, but what's happening is that Jesus is answering them by, when he says, I am he, he's, you could say he's using divine speech as it were, because I am was how God revealed himself to Moses, to Israel, to Hisbimebi estimate. I am, which is Yahweh and Hebrew. God said, that's the name you are to know me by. And Israelites actually by this point didn't like saying that out loud. This is God's name.

And so, but Jesus very simply just says, I am he. And they know that there's power and there's authority behind those words. Jesus isn't, Jesus isn't hiding who he is.

He's announcing very clearly. It's the divine Son is announcing who he is as he hands himself over to be arrested. He's the one with the power and authority here, not the soldiers. And in fact, we see Jesus total control even more, don't we, in verses 10 to 11.

Peter pulls out a sword, swings it, strikes a serve, the high priest's ear. But Jesus says to Peter, put your sword in its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

[11 : 28] I mean, just as an aside, do you notice how John includes the servant's name? It's just like he's giving us that little detail that only an eyewitness would know. Just it's like telling us, look, if you don't believe me, go and ask Malchus. You'll know who he is. You can find him.

You can ask about his ear. He'll tell you what took place. He'll tell you what happened in the garden that night. Jesus knows what is going to happen. He's in total power. He's got control. He has the authority. The only way that Jesus is going to die is if he chooses to die. This is voluntary.

And Jesus made that clear all the way back in chapter 10, the passage that Euna read for us earlier, when Jesus said, I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, and he goes on to say, no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. As one writer puts it, Jesus is not a pathetic martyr who's buffeted this way and that by the whims of the crowd and the cruel winds of fate.

He purposefully and voluntarily goes to die. But why did Jesus die? In some ways, this just broadens our question. We now know that Jesus died because he chose to, but why did he choose to die?

[12 : 48] Why did he have to die? Why was he so adamant that he had to die, so adamant that he stopped Peter intervening at that point? And that leads us to our second point. First word, if you want to have a word for each as voluntary, our second word is propitiation. So a lot longer word than voluntary, sorry, but it really summarizes well the next point that Jesus is making. Propitiation, Jesus died to take God's wrath. And the key verse we see for this is verse 11. When Jesus says to Peter, put away your sword, he says, shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

Jesus says, I have to die because I have to drink the cup. And the cup refers to the cup of God's wrath. It comes up several times in the Old Testament. Let me just, two passages if you wanted to look them up.

The first one is Jeremiah chapter 25, verse 15. And here, God tells Jeremiah to give this cup of his of his wrath to all these nations that are under his judgment. He says, thus says the Lord the God of Israel, take from my hand this cup of wine of wrath and make all the nations to whom I send to you drink it.

They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword I am sending among them. Or even in Psalm 75 verse 8. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine well mixed and he pours out from it.

And all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs. This cup is the full measure of God's wrath. All of God's wrath is punishment against sin.

[14 : 27] I mean you might, and it's it's filled to the brim and it must be drained to the dregs. That's the key. It's God's full punishment, his full wrath against wickedness. And in in short Jesus is saying that this God's just and wrath punishment he is going to drink.

Now when we talk about God's wrath that can often make us feel uncomfortable. We find the topic of of God's judgment if his wrath uncomfortable. However God's wrath is necessary. Without it God wouldn't be just. And we might not sound like the sound of judgment but deep down we know it's something that's important. Deep down we know it's something that we do all want.

We want justice. This world is full of horrific evils and things and the one one of the things that angers us most maybe even more than some of the evils is when those things go unpunished or when people don't get punished sufficiently. When someone has a short at short jail sentence or something and gets away scot-free or because of their privilege or their power or their money they actually justice isn't met out. We crave justice. We hate it when we see world leaders. We see things go unpunished and when we see that there isn't justice in this world.

And so actually it's a great comfort that there is a God who will judge. That no evil will ultimately prevail. That no one will escape justice.

We crave justice but we have to remember that God's justice is not just necessary. It's also fair. Many people who even who don't believe in God's judgment do believe in judgment itself although people think that they can meet out the judgment themselves. You see that in the storm that storm of judgment that we see on social media when people say this kind of thing is wrong. Everyone is quick to say this is what should happen. This is this should happen to these people.

[16 : 35] People are quick to make judgments and to say that judgment should be met out. The problem is that we're not always fair and even the best judges in countries that we're privileged to have like ours which are democratic even the best judges aren't always perfectly just.

And that's because we don't always know the whole picture and that's because we ourselves are flawed. The fact is that God is a judge who is fair.

The Bible tells us that he judges from the secrets of man's hearts. There's nothing that's hidden from him. He knows the whole picture and he is totally fair. He's not unbiased. He's not corrupt.

He's totally fair in all his judgments. And that's and we're happy for that when we think of people like Putin and Pol Pot and Hitler. We think okay they deserve to be judged but because God is fair and that also means that it's not just those kind of people that fall below the standard. Actually the reality is that we all fall below God's standard and we all deserve his wrath.

We all stand condemned. The cup of God's wrath is his punishment against sinners. It's necessary. It's fair. The uncomfortable thing is that we all deserve to drink it. The surprise then in this chapter is that Jesus is the one who says I must drink it.

[18 : 02] We'll do all we can to get as far away from God's judgment as we can. Jesus does all he can to step into our place and to take God's judgment. When Jesus speaks about drinking the cup of wrath he's explaining to us what is going to happen on the cross. From a human perspective Jesus is about to undergo incredible torture that will lead to his death as he slowly dies from suffocation and exhaustion. But behind it all what is happening is that Jesus is drinking the cup of God's wrath.

The punishment for the sin of his people. Every wrong thought is another drop. Every wrong action. Every wrong word drop drop until that cup is overflowing. But Jesus says I've come to drink it all down to the dregs. Jesus isn't going to just taste God's wrath. He's going to drink it all. Why? Why would Jesus the only innocent person who has ever lived decide and be determined to face God's wrath?

Why would he choose to drink the cup? And that brings us to our third point. First point voluntary, second point propitiation, which means Jesus choosing to take God's wrath on himself.

Third point substitution. Jesus died in our place. As Jesus is arrested the camera now follows him from the house of the high priest. And by now most of Jesus' disciples have scattered but there's two disciples remaining. There's Simon Peter and one who we just told is another disciple and that's probably John. He often speaks about himself in the third person and he knows enough eyewitness detail to be able to know what's going on here and record it.

Anyway you can imagine them keeping to the shadows as they follow the soldiers up to the house and they're wondering what on earth is going to happen to Jesus. And pretty soon they arrive at their destination. If this was a film this is both will be the point where the music of the evil bad guy starts playing as they arrive at the high priest's house. And John is known to the servant or this other disciple probably John and so he's able to go straight in. Peter can't know so John has to come back for him. And the servant girl at the door naturally sees John knows that he's one of Jesus' disciples and makes the connection and so says to Peter you aren't one of this man's disciples too are you? We don't know the kind of tone that she said it in she could have said it disdainfully.

[20 : 41] All we know is that's the question she asked but immediately Peter with us and says I am not and he walks through. It's shocking isn't it? Here's Peter the de facto lead apostle who back in chapter 13 verse 37 said I will lay down my life for you and now under this light interrogation of a servant girl he completely denies his savior.

And it wasn't even like Peter was alone in this situation the other disciple was right there. He had his Christian mate standing there and he still chose to deny that he wasn't he was a follower of Jesus.

In case we haven't grasped the severity of Jesus' words just look at where Peter then goes to stand. Having denied Jesus Peter then goes and stands with the very soldiers who just arrested Jesus. It's just like in denying Jesus Peter now aligns himself stands with the world that hates Jesus. But that's not the end of the story isn't it? Come verse 25 again Peter is questioned.

Maybe the flames just flickered brighter at that point and they saw his face but this relative of the man whose ear Peter slashed off asks him are you one of his disciples? And twice more Peter denies it and then the cock crows.

Peter cowers before his questioners and he denies Jesus. This really is the low point of discipleship in John's gospel.

[22 : 13] But John didn't just insert Jesus' interrogation into the middle but John also inserts Jesus' interrogation into the whole middle of this. Do you notice in verses 19 to 24 we hear about Jesus being questioned and that's really just to highlight the contrast. While Jesus is being questioned and he denies nothing and he's completely innocent we see this brutal contrast to Peter who denies everything.

Jesus is determined to go to the cross and he says nothing and Peter is does anything he can to save his own skin.

And John weaves this interrogation in and out to really just contrast the two situations and show us just how bad Peter is to highlight his faithful faithlessness, how fickle he was. But he also did it to show us why Jesus had to go to the cross. He had to go to the cross for Peter.

He had to go to the cross because for disciples who deny, because people like you and me even when we're following Jesus, we can do the best that we can. We can live as well as we can in this life but the fact is at the end of the day we're going to be like Peter or worse. We're all going to be like that disciple who denied.

We need Jesus to go to the cross for us. And that brings us really to verse back to verse 14 which is the key verse to understanding this section. It's an editorial comment, one that John inserts in to explain what's happening and he says he's reminding us of Caiaphas's words back in chapter 11 who said that it would be expedient or it would be advantageous for one man to die for the people.

[24 : 08] John is giving us the lens through which we should see this whole episode. This isn't just a story about someone denying and Jesus being questioned. This is the story about Jesus being questioned and Jesus going to the cross in the place of this disciple who denied. It's about substitution Jesus in Peter's place and the whole context as well of this happening lens that itself to this. So this is all happening in the Passover festival. Now the Passover festival celebrated when God rescued his people from Egypt and at that night of Passover God was going to kill every firstborn in Egypt and the only way that the Israelites firstborn could survive is if a lamb was killed in their place. Passover is all about substitution, a lamb dying in the place of the firstborn. Jesus is saying his death is all about substitution. Jesus dying in the place of people like you and me who deserve to be drinking that cup of God's wrath.

Jesus is dying the death of a substitute. As he said again in chapter 10, he's the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Who is Jesus going to sacrifice himself for? Well people like Peter and disciples like him, like you and me. Peter's denial isn't a very flattering picture but actually if we zoom out it's part of a beautiful portrait of redemption. You see the uglier that Peter's denial gets the more wonderful that we see what Jesus does. The more we should be filled with awe and wonder that Jesus would set his face to go to the cross.

Even in that room as his question set his face to go to the cross knowing that just outside Peter is denying him. It really it really is summarized in many ways in Paul's famous words that God chose his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, while we were still sinners.

It's not that while we're good, while we're deserving. There's plenty, there's lots of kind of people dying for someone or dying in their place. There's lots of examples of that in film, in TV, that kind of thing isn't there? Someone jumps into the way of a president, takes a bullet for the president. If you like Harry Potter there's plenty of substitution there. People dying on behalf of someone else.

There's even that in Disney, although people often come back to life in Disney to make it a bit more palatable. But in none of those examples do you see someone sacrificing themselves for someone who's well evil or someone who's the bad guy. You don't see James Bond jumping in the way of of henchman number three to take a bullet. It's always in the people who seem to be good, who seem to be deserving. But that's not the case for us.

[27 : 13] That's not the case for Peter. And thank God that that is not the case. If it was, if we had to be, if Jesus only died in the place of good people then he wouldn't be dying for anyone. But he died in the place of Peter.

And he died in the place of people like Peter. People whose lives weren't put together, but people whose lives were falling apart. People who deserved that cup of God's wrath. But Jesus said, I'm going to drink it for you. I have to drink it for you.

Peter's denial didn't put Jesus off from the cross. It showed its necessity. Only by going to the cross could Peter have any hope. Only by going to the cross can we have any hope.

And you might be sitting here and listening. You might be listening online as someone who's never put your trust in Jesus. And maybe you've come to realize that whatever you look like on the outside that your heart is a mess. That before God you are a mess. That your life is full of sin.

Maybe you know that you've spent your life ignoring God, rejecting him. And that you need him. You might think, forget denying Jesus. I'm more like those religious leaders who wanted Jesus dead.

[28 : 35] Well you can take heart because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And he died for you if you accept Jesus' death on your behalf. Jesus went to the cross for Peter. And I don't now doubt that Peter would have said that denying Jesus was the worst thing that he ever did. But why did he then insist that John include it? Why did John include it? Well to remind us that if Jesus could die in the place of Peter, who was denying him just as Jesus was in the other room, then Jesus can die for you. There's no one too bad. There's no one too far, too out of reach, that Jesus' death isn't enough for them.

Jesus died as a substitute for sinners. That's good news for everyone. But that's also important for us. Those of you who are trusting in Jesus, who would call yourselves Christians, we need to keep coming back to that truth.

Because Jesus' death was for those who are, who stumble and sin. It was for Peter. It's for me and you. For Peter it wasn't, okay, right. You're a disciple. Three strikes though and you're out.

Because those would have been Peter's three strikes. It's not that God, that our sins are forgiven and then we have to try to keep up the good work. And the moment we sin or the moment we sin a certain number of times, we're then chucked out again or we're under God's wrath or he no longer loves us as a father. No. Rather Jesus, it's, what we, what we find here is that Jesus died in Peter's place and nothing can separate us from him. Maybe tonight you feel very convicted about things that you've done this week. You feel I've got no right to stand, to sit here. I've got no right to come before God.

Maybe you've stumbled in sin. Maybe it's the same thing again and again and it's weighing you down. Maybe you feel burned by church and you actually just want nothing to do with it. Well whatever it is, there's no one too far away. However far you've drifted, you're not beyond Christ's grasp.

[30 : 48] Devil would love to tell us wouldn't he, that our sin puts us beyond the pale. But don't let that rob you of the comfort this passage offers. Don't let the conviction of sin rob you of the comfort that Christ offers. Yes, we need to be convicted. We need to recognize what we've done but that conviction needs to come from God, this Holy Spirit, who not only convicts us of our sin but then points us to Christ, who takes away our sin and sets us free.

There's no stain that's too dark, that Jesus' blood can't wash away, no denial that can't lead to restoration. We don't have time to look at it but at the very end of John's Gospel, Peter comes back and meets with Jesus again.

There isn't Jesus and you can imagine Peter is full of anxiety at that moment. What on earth is Jesus going to say? But Jesus restores him. Jesus gently restores him and commissions him to tell people about Jesus, to feed his sheep.

That same language, same shepherding language. So why did Jesus die? Jesus chose to die to take God's wrath as a substitute for sinners like you and me so we can be restored into relationship with him. Jesus died for sinners.

Jesus died for saints who stumble and that's good news. That's the Gospel we need to hear again and again each day because we stumble each day. We need to be reminded of the cross each day so that we can have comfort of hope and restoration. Let's pray.