

## It Is Finished. So Come Out Of The Shadows!

Brothers and sisters, each year at Easter we celebrate with Christians around the world the wonderful reality of the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Praise God! Indeed, those words with which I myself and pastors and ministers all over the world greet their congregations on resurrection Sunday with as you are all aware are, He is risen. With the people all responding, He is risen indeed. It is always a joyous moment that believers share worldwide. It is dare I say, even a small glimpse into heavenly glory. That we will all share, when that sea of humanity from Adam to the last person ever to be born, stands before Christ's throne. And we His people, His body, His church, hear those wonderful words from Matthew 25 (once He has "separated the sheep from the goats"), yes, we hear those wonderful words from the mouth of the King Himself ring out for the entire universe to hear v34 "Come you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."

Friends did you realise? Have you ever considered that what is ahead of us has been awaiting our arrival "since the creation of the world." 1 Corinthians 2:9 "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." Yes heaven, (or indeed hell) awaits us all. All depending upon whom it is that we have lived this life for, and given our allegiance to. But before all of that is able to take place, there was first a price that had to be paid, that we ourselves, we're incapable of paying!

As I said some weeks ago in our studies in James, we are all worthy of hell. And if it be not for Jesus, heaven's glory in the presence of the King, would escape us all. Yes sin had to be dealt with. That is why Jesus came! Yes He came to do that which we cannot do for ourselves, pay the debt for our sin. As you are all aware, that is what the Cross is all about. The pure and spotless" sacrificial Lamb of God, shedding His blood that we might be cleansed and forgiven, and accepted by God!

We all know the words from the Lord's mouth upon the Cross, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" and "It is finished," which I will address a bit later. But friends, what were the things that were of key importance to Jesus as He hung up on that cross before He spoke those words? That is what I'm hoping to explain today. And also, how should the reality of the death of Jesus affect us, if we call ourselves Christian? Well a friend of mine who has gone to glory now, suggested one night at Bible study, something of which I am in full agreement. That while He hung upon the Cross, Jesus had the name of every single person for whom He died upon His lips. Have you ever thought of that? That the Creator of the universe was suffering and agonising with you personally in mind? Yes suffering and agonising for your soul!

It's a sobering thing, brothers and sisters, to try and get your head around. *My Lord what love is this that paid so dearly, that I the guilty one may go free? Amazing love O what sacrifice, the Son of God given for me. My debt He paid and my death He died. That I might live. That I might live*, we sing. As Jesus hung upon that Cross (one criminal on His right and one on His left, both hurling insults at Him the scriptures tell us) something miraculous happens. The Spirit of God enters into one of them, (we don't know which one) and he begins to rebuke the other man. Luke 23:40-43 "But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God?" he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong". Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom". Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, this very day you will be with Me in paradise." Dear friends, that man, had been confronted with that thing which we must all do. Meet Jesus at the Cross!

Beloved, as we picture that image in our minds eye of three men upon crosses, one either side of our Saviour, we are confronted with that reality of those two roads of life. One leading us towards Jesus and heaven, while the other is taking us away from Him to hell! There is no escaping this truth. Each of us must fall before the Cross on our own, as this thief has been forced to do. And the conclusion which he has come to? Jesus is Lord, yes Jesus is God. "Jesus remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

But what else happened while Jesus was hanging on that cross? Well He had the words of Psalm 22 upon His lips, as in His humanity (remember it was his humanity not his deity that lived that sinless life. Two nations in one person) but yes in His humanity he felt that complete and utter alienation from God. Yes He felt "forsaken," as the iniquity of all of His people fell upon Him! Beloved, Jesus felt that alienation that we are born with, and that only His death could dissolve. Psalm 22:1 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" David continues in v2 "O my God I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night and am not silent." No, dear friends, the anguish of Christ upon the Cross we should not just glance over. Because those moments of our despair, those moments of our loneliness, those moments of our brokenness and alienation, Jesus carried to the Cross!

But what of the soldiers? Well, it says in John 19:23-24 "When the soldiers crucified Jesus they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. Let's not tear it they said to one another let's decide by lot who will get it. This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said. They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. So this is what the soldiers did." But Brethren, which "scripture was fulfilled?" Well David continues to describe his own sufferings, as they prophetically point us to Jesus` Cross, even describing the scene! V22:16 "dogs have surrounded me, a band of evil men has surrounded me, they have pierced my hands and my feet." Yes the "dogs," the rabid people of that day we're baying for Jesus` Blood! Do you remember their words to Pontius Pilate? "Crucify him." "Crucify him." "Let his blood be on our heads and the heads of our children." Yes "the dogs have surrounded me; they have pierced my hands and my feet."

Beloved how astounding, that over 1000 years before Jesus` death on the Cross it was described in such detail. v17 "I can count all my bones, people gloat over me." This was alluding to the fact that unlike the two criminals who were crucified with Him whose legs were broken to hasten their death because the Sabbath was approaching, all of Jesus` bones were intact, because He was already dead. The spear into His side when both "water and blood poured forth," being proof of that. Yes people "standing and gloating at the Saviour`s death." And then finally, v18 "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." Again how astounding, that such minute and intricate detail of the death of Jesus foretold over 1000 years before it came to be. It is such clear evidence for us that the Bible is not some mere book, it is the very Word of God. Even "breathed out" by His Spirit, 2 Timothy 3:16 Yes "all scripture is God breathed."

But why did all of this take place? Why did this all have to happen? Again, it was all for us! And yes more scripture is fulfilled. Isaiah 53:4-7 "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent so he did not open his mouth." Yes "pierced for our transgressions, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Indeed brothers and sisters, all of the scripture is about, and points us to Jesus! We read in Luke 24:27 "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself." v32 "They asked each other, where our hearts not burning within us well he talked with us on the road and opened up the scriptures to us." Beloved, the Lord Jesus while He was on earth was all about proclaiming, explaining, and fulfilling the scriptures. Not changing, not subtracting, not deviating from, but fulfilling the scriptures. And the amazing thing, is that that is what He was concerned with even while he was upon the Cross!

John 19:28-29 "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'" But which scripture did this fulfil? v15 of Psalm22 "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, (which is actually a sun dried brittle piece of old pottery) and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth." And also Psalm 69:19-21 "You know that I am scorned, disgraced and ashamed, all my enemies are before you. Scorn has broken my heart and left me helpless, I looked for sympathy but there was none, for comforters but I found none. They put gall in my food, and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

Brothers and sisters, why have I used so much scripture today in speaking of things that you are all more than well aware? Well it is because I have been so convicted of late of the crucial need in our world of uncertainties and things changing from one day to the next, (even sadly within the scriptures at the hands of evil men and women) to point out that Jesus Himself, lived and breathed in His "fulfilment" of the Word of God. Indeed, He is the living word. John 19:30 "When he had received the drink Jesus said "It is finished. With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

Now friends firstly, I want you to notice that "Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Luke 23:46 tells us, "Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." Yes "Jesus gave up his spirit" willingly. It wasn't ripped from His grasp as with the rich fool who built the bigger barns. "You fool, I tell you the truth, this very night your life will be demanded from you." No, in full control, having fulfilled all that He came to do, Jesus prayed and "committed his spirit into the hands of his Father, bowed his head and gave up his spirit." Yes "It is finished."

And yet what was "finished" dear friends? Well Matthew Henry explains: He is "finished" suffering the indignity of bearing the mocking and the ridicule of those creatures that He had made from the dust and breathed into them the breath of life! He is "finished," being that One who though being God, who "has measured the heavens in the span of his hand," and sustains the universe with the word of His mouth, is "finished" submitting to the authorities that "are but a missed that appears and is gone." "It is finished" all of the Jewish ceremonial law with its regulations and sacrifices. Yes all of those things that were but faint shadows of that which was to be fulfilled in Jesus were "finished." The way for men to come to God through the sacrificing of animals daily, and then through some high priest that offered a once a year sacrifice, for the collective sin of the nation behind that curtain in the holy of holies in the temple, was "finished." That curtain was ripped "from top to bottom," opening the way for men and women and children to come directly to God without impediments, because Christ had sacrificed Himself once and for all time! And the "curtain was torn top to bottom," before "Jesus gave up his spirit." Yes "It is finished. Jesus` own sufferings: His beatings, His lashings, His agonising and suffering for the sin of His people falling upon Him, and the anguish of His humanity being separated from His Father, was "finished." Yes He had crushed the head of Satan at the Cross. "It is finished." Praise God and Hallelujah. Amen!

But brothers and sisters, the last thing that I want us to look at today is how Jesus` death affected two men. Because these things really struck a chord in me personally! The first man's name is Nicodemus. He was a very interesting and complex man. He was actually one of the members of the

Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. So he was a man of some importance, tremendous standing in the Jewish community and no doubt, a good deal of authority. We encounter him three times throughout the gospel of John.

Firstly, in John 3:1-21, in quite a long discourse between himself and Jesus, containing some of the most well-known verses and doctrinal teachings throughout the whole of the Bible. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of being “born again.” And in v16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.’ But friends if we only come into this passage at v16, we wouldn't know that this whole passage is a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. And that it is a private conversation which takes place after dark. And it takes place at night, because Nicodemus comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness. And why? Well it's quite obvious really, he doesn't want to be seen. Because to be a Jew, and a member of the ruling council no less, and to be seen with or even associated with Jesus, had tremendous consequences! So they have this famous discussion about being “born again,” and what it means, and the implications of those things. And the section finishes in v21, as Nicodemus seems to disappear from the picture.

Next we see him in John 7:50-51 where he almost bravely speaks up for Jesus amongst the council. “Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier who was one of their own number, asked, “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?” But he gets cut down very quickly v52 “They replied, are you from Galilee too? Look into it and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.” So he thinks it best to hold his tongue. Then finally, he is one of the two men who courageously go to Pontius Pilate to ask for Jesus` body so they can prepare it for burial. And we will look into that in a moment.

Now the second man's name is Joseph of Arimathea. And we read about him in Mark 15:42-46. Indeed we actually read of him in all of the four gospels. He too was “a member of the Jewish ruling council.” No doubt he knew Nicodemus. In John 19:38 we read “Later Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, (*and friends there are the words*) but secretly, because he feared the Jews”! Interesting isn't it? Just like Nicodemus he was a Jew. “A rich man” from Matthew. “A prominent member of the council” from Mark. “A good and upright man” from Luke “who had not consented to their decision and action.” So Beloved like Nicodemus, “he was a disciple of Jesus, but it was all in secret.” Luke even tells us that “he was waiting for the Kingdom of God.” But again, like Nicodemus who had come to Jesus under the cover of darkness, Joseph`s discipleship was all “done in secret!”

Friends we can all be like that can't we? Depending on who we are with and where we are at the time. We can almost be under the cover of darkness for Jesus. Perhaps even hiding in plain sight, by blending in with those around us. I get it. Sometimes the easiest place to hide is out in the open. A conversation may be happening, the quality of the language starts to slide along with our own, and then the Name of the Lord is blasphemed or profane, and it may even be by somebody that we are trying to witness to.

Have you ever been there? I have. It's hard at times being out in the open for Christ. Sometimes in the midst of our own family and friends it's hardest of all. But brothers and sisters, the day arrives, (as it did for both Nicodemus and Joseph) when we must come out of hiding. Yes we must come out of the shadows and into the open, and seek to stay there. And in these evil and depraved days in which we now live, it's all the more important for us to do so! Because Jesus said in Mark 8:38 “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.” And again dear friends, these things really struck a chord in me personally, because I was both Nicodemus and

Joseph, but without the uprightness and qualifications! I've shared with you all before, the first time I ever went to church I too snuck in at night, and parked up the street, because like Nicodemus, I didn't want anyone to see me. I was more than happy in secret and under the cover of darkness.

But Beloved, if we are truly for Christ we cannot stay there, we've got to come out into the open and declare who we are. And friends the reality of Jesus' death will eventually do this to us, if we are truly His! Yes knowing that He died for us, will do this to us, just as the Lord's death did for both Nicodemus and Joseph! And what we're about to read, we shouldn't downplay what these two men did.

Mark 15:42-47 "It was preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath. So as evening approached, 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. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph brought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid."

And in John's account we read in John 19:39 "He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds." Both men prepared the body and then laid him in the tomb, Joseph's own tomb, and then rolled the stone over the entrance. But again, we shouldn't downplay the courage that this took. Their own counsel had plotted against Him. Jesus was crucified because their people had cried out "crucify" "crucify." They were going against the collective will of the entire Jewish nation, including the authorities!

Dear friends, more and more in Australia today, this is who we are being called to be. Those who because of our faith and believe in the God of the Bible, His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit, are in opposition to that society in which we find ourselves. The spirit of Australia continues to cry out "crucify" "crucify." More and more true followers of Christ, Christians, are bearing the brunt of the attacks of the depraved, evil and anti-Christ society and powers that be, amongst whom we live. And there is no doubt, that things are getting worse!

The question is, how will we respond to the death of the crucified Christ? The Son of God, our Saviour? That One whose death, was so intricately foretold in such detail, over 1000 years before he died. That one who "fulfilled" all of the things spoken of Himself in the scriptures. That sacrificial Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. The one who cried out in anguish, "My God my God why have you forsaken me?" Because of our sin. And "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." And finally, "It is finished." Yes how will we respond to these earthshattering, death delivering and sin cleansing realities? Will we stay in the shadows, living under the cover of darkness? Concealing who we are or claim to be? Even the secret Christian? Or like Nicodemus and Joseph, will we boldly come out of the shadows and into the open, and claim, (not only Jesus body) but also His Life, His Death, His Resurrection, and His Ascension into glory to His eternal place, "At the right hand of God. From whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead." Yes Jesus' death dear friends, How will it affect you?

Let's pray.