

John 19:17

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[0 : 00] Now I'd like to turn for a little time to this chapter that we were reading from in the gospel according to John, John chapter 19. And I really want to take just some words in verse 17 to give some focus for our thinking together against the backdrop really of Calvary and the Christ of Calvary for a little time this evening. At the middle of verse 16 under that section that begins with the heading of crucifixion, we read, So the soldiers took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out to the place of the skull, which Naremaic is called Golgotha, and here they crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

And so it goes on, and I'm sure you know it so well. I was thinking about this passage perhaps more acutely against the backdrop of many of the events that have been taking place within the different churches and denominations in recent times. I'm sure that you would all agree with me that in these days in which we find ourselves living and serving, there is a lot of unsettled feeling within many of the churches and not least after the last general assemblies of some of our denominations and not least my own that kind of focused my mind and made me ask the question, well, what is it that we are all about? What is it that is of key importance for us?

I'm in a sense in a privileged position of being out of, you like, the heart of so much of what goes on in the ministry. And I feel a certain sense of freedom that I maybe wouldn't have felt if I was still under so many of the committees that belong to the different bodies of the churches. But coming back to the Word, I asked myself, well, what is it that we ought to be doing? And it would seem to me that we ought to be focusing on the cross and focusing on the Christ. What is it that is fundamental to our faith? What is it that is fundamental to our being here together tonight?

What is it that is fundamental to the need of this congregation and every other congregation and denomination? Surely it is none other than Jesus Christ Himself, and especially His finished work on the cross at Calvary. Sometimes people will sing with great feeling in different places.

The words from the old familiar hymn that I'm sure you've sung in different places yourselves, tell me the old, old story. And it is the old, old story that we need to get back to, is it not?

[3 : 25] Tell me the old, old story of unseen things above, of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love. Well, what is the old, old story? What is the word that we want primarily to go out into the world and to share with our neighbors and our friends and our colleagues in the workplace? What is the word that men and women need to hear tonight who are seeking to satisfy a hunger and a thirst within themselves at every broken fountain that is found on every street and almost every corner of the city of Aberdeen? Men and women out tonight looking for satisfaction. Men and women out tonight perhaps encouraging one another along the road of godlessness and all of them seeking for something that they know not what, and it is here for them as it is for us in the gospel. What is the old, old story of Jesus and His love? Well, it seems to me that it is perhaps supremely John 3 and 16.

God so loved the world, all who are in it, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him, should not perish. The gospel would seem to me also to be John 6 and 37.

Whosoever will come unto me, I will in no wise cast out. No one that we cannot go to with a message. No place that is close to us. There is nowhere that we couldn't enter with confidence and tell them of the message of the gospel and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, there is something to captivate our minds and also to inspire us and to enthuse us, not just in prayer, not just when we are together and seeking to encourage one another, not in the ways of godlessness, but in the ways of godliness.

This is why we ought to take care, to be found together in meetings such as this, that we might encourage one another with our presence and with our conversation and with the message that God gives us from His Word. The old, old story is also Matthew 11 and 28, Come unto me, all you who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest, and we could multiply it and multiply it and multiply it.

But we know too that the same story is told in other ways. There's the words of the song, softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. There is reports of individuals have been touched by these words.

[6 : 49] I read some time ago about one famous singer who had been brought to the point in his own life where he was so low and so in despair at the abominable style of his own life and the things that he had done that he decided that he would lock himself away into a labyrinth of caves where he expected that no one would find him. It was going to be deep into a hillside. He would go in there and he would use the drugs that he had been familiar with for so long and he would just use them up and he would die in there and no one would find him. But Jesus found him. And even in the heart of that den and darkness that he was in, he was able to come out and after rehabilitation could sing with feeling, softly and tenderly, softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me, earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, O sinner, come home. Maybe he's doing exactly that in your heart here in your heart. In your heart here in the service tonight, softly, tenderly, the Word is speaking and the Spirit is calling. And it isn't just the sound of words that you hear, but also the presence and the drawing influences of God himself. And you know that it is none other than God, that it isn't the words or the voice of some human form or shape. That is only a vessel that is used in the hands of God, but it is God himself. And he is calling, how is he calling? He is calling us to come home. Every one of us, O sinner, come home. And the way we come home is by way of the old rugged cross.

There is no other way. There is no access into the heavenly kingdom through any kind of religious door, through deeds, through works, through self-improvement. It's all by way of the cross.

I want to think about it for a little. Think about its purpose as we read about it here in the service, in the passage that we have before us this evening. What is the purpose of the cross? Well, we could say many, many things about that, but we need to confine our remarks to simply a few.

And it would seem to me that the cross fulfills so much. It fulfills so many of the promises that are everywhere, found, scattered about in the Old Testament, and not least in Malachi 3 and 17, where God is speaking and he's saying of his own people, they shall be mine. He doesn't say, they might be mine, but they shall be mine on that day when I make up my jewels. And this is the fulfillment of all of that taking place. How is it going to happen? It's going to happen as a result of the cross. And if someone was to say to the Lord, well, Lord, how can you say that with such authority and certainty? What right do you have more than any other spiritual entity? And there are many of them abroad at work in the world tonight. How can you say that? If he was to be challenged in the way that he was challenged when we read about it in Job 1, and they came and reported before the

Lord and Satan came to explain himself. And if God was challenged, God could easily say, well, they shall be mine on that day because by my power I created them. In the first instance, no one here by chance, no one here by accident, all by design, by my Spirit, by my power I created them, by my Spirit I have called them. We're not here by chance tonight either. We are drawn into the presence of this place by the power of the Spirit of God. By my blood I have cleansed them. That's what we read of when we read the Scriptures, and not least in these latter chapters of the Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels, and John chapter 19. By my blood I cleansed them. By my balm I healed them.

[11 : 33] They were so broken. They were so hurt. They were so battered by so many at the hands of the world and the words of the world. It had taken such a toll upon so many of them. But my balm has healed them.

My grace has restored them. My mercy has forgiven them, and they must understand that they are priceless in my sight. Now, you like me might not feel as though you are priceless, but that's how God sees it.

There is that importance given to your life tonight, and even to mine. You like me might not feel as though you are priceless in the sight of a holy God.

And you see, it would seem to me that it should be so important for us to understand that, and also to understand that it is important for us to make our spiritual standing clear in the world, to let the world know where we stand, on whose side we are on, to let the world know that we belong to Jesus, that we have been to Jesus, because there is another power, there is another influence that is out in the world tonight, and also seeking to influence you, and will continue to seek to influence you and me until the day we are finally taken from time into eternity. And he would also want to say that they shall be mine. They shall be mine on that day when I'm finally cast out of the presence of God forever. When I am consigned to take my place in the pit of hell.

I want them to be mine. I want them to be all mine in that place where there is no more hope, no help, no relief, and no release. That's putting it somewhat bluntly, but nevertheless, it's putting it very truthfully and biblically. In Dante's great allegory of the inferno, he has this inscription, as it were, above the doorway that leads into a lost eternity, and the words thereon inscribed are, abandoned hope, all ye who enter here.

[14 : 00] You see, that's what the world and the church is up against. There is a battle going on. There is a warfare taking place. It is spiritual, and we can counteract it with our worship and our prayers and our witness to the world around us. This is what the church is for, is it not? Reaching out, as well as reaching up, seeking to make the presence of God known to others. We want to ask ourselves tonight at the start of this service, is it clear to Jesus who we are following?

Would the Lord be able to say with certainty tonight with regard to what goes on in your heart and your life and your mind and your conversation and your home that you belong to Him?

Jesus, who carries His cross to the place of the skull, He asks and calls, if any man will come after me, let him, let her deny himself and take up the cross and follow me. Matthew 16 and 24.

And various other parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels. As the hymn writer puts it, Jesus calls us, oh, the tumult, out of the turmoil, if you like. And maybe some life here tonight is in turmoil. And there's a word from God for that life. Jesus is calling to you out of the turmoil, while off our life's wild, restless sea. And life can be such a restless place for us, can't it?

We know what that is, to be troubled and tried and tested on every side. But day by day, His sweet voice soundeth, saying, Christian, follow me, follow me. I'm going somewhere, and I can lead you somewhere. Jesus calls us across all the great crises of life to come, and to come by the narrow way and the way of the old rugged cross. He's calling to sinners to come home. But listen, it is not just Jesus that knocks on the door of every sinner's heart. It is also Satan.

[16 : 20] He calls too, but He doesn't say where He is leading. All He says is that the way is broad. There is lots to do. There is lots of company. The company is mixed.

But when we read our Bibles, we discover that His destination is destruction. There's so much that we could say that would be so colorful about destruction, but we would confine ourselves to saying tonight that that place is the place where there is absolutely no satisfaction. Yet all who are on the broad road are looking for this very thing that doesn't exist at the end of that broad highway. It's so tragic. So tragic.

But the cross changes that because the cross has power. I remember reading some years ago and being greatly moved by the thing that I read. It was written by a missionary. This person was in Africa and had been serving amongst the nomadic people. And she tells a story of how she was invited on one occasion to go to the home or the tent or whatever it was where a dying boy was found in his mother's care.

And it was recognized, and this goes back a long way, that these missionaries, they had some basic medical skills at the very least, and they were able to help people. But when she saw this little boy, she realized that there was nothing that she could do for his body. But at the same time, she asked if she could tell him a story. And the story that she told him, as you would expect, was the old, old story of Jesus and his love. It's so important when we're witnessing to others to witness at a level that they are able to understand. And she witnessed in this way. She told him the story at a level that he could identify with. And they were a people who knew what it was to have hard times, to be despised, and to be rejected when they went to so many different places. And she explained how this had been Jesus' lot in life, and how he was mocked, and how he was stripped, and how he was beaten, and how he was crowned with thorns. And over the time, she explained how he was crucified, and was dead, and buried, and went on to tell of how he rose again, how he ascended into heaven, and also where he now lives, and rules, and drains to help those who will trust in him. And how he also has power to forgive sin, and to prepare a place in his presence for all who will believe that they may pass through death, thus it's simply a doorway, and enter into his most marvelous light, and life for all eternity."

The boy was interested. It seems to, there seems to have been a flicker of interest running across his face. And next day, when she returned to see how he was doing, she told him the story again, and this time she emphasized the power of the blood, and the importance of the power of the blood, how it cleanses sin. And he seemed to be even more interested, but growing more feeble. And the following day, she thought, rather than going over the same ground, she better tell him something about maybe a miracle, or the miracles of Jesus, or the birth of Jesus. And immediately, she began, the boy stopped her and said, no, no, not that. Tell me about the cross and the blood and the power to forgive. And she did. And the next day when she came, she found that the boy was dead. Or should we say he was more alive than he had ever been in his life before? The signs seemed to suggest that he had gone to be with Jesus. This is the power of the cross. And we forget that the power is in the Word of God, and the power is in the cross. It isn't in the things that we say about it. We're too reticent about speaking about the things that really matter to the world that is around us. The power is in the Word, and the power of the cross. And the power of the cross not only touched this boy and transformed him, but we can believe that it transported his soul into the presence of God in glory.

[21 : 37] And what right have you got, or what right have I got to withhold this from anyone? Surely it is the greatest privilege that we have here to be told and to understand and even to be allowed to feel the power of the cross, to feel the power of God cursing through our souls and our bodies on occasions, and filling us with a sense of excitement that enables us to share the story with others.

That is the wonder of the cross. There is power, there is purpose, and there is a person we notice also on this cross. And the person on the cross loves to minister to need. You see, we sometimes perhaps forget too that Jesus is a person.

Many know the story of the cross. There are many tonight all around this city who will know the story of the cross, but perhaps don't know the Christ of the cross. And that's the key, is it not?

Do we know the person of Jesus in our own lives? Do we have a relationship with him? This is what he calls us into, isn't it? A relationship with God. Not the formal exercise of some religion. Not the running through of a set number of verses and the reciting of a set number of psalms or catechisms or whatever.

Good as that is, we don't deny that for a moment. But a relationship with Jesus. How do we come to know him? We come to know him by believing his promises, by receiving his Spirit, by resting in the promises of his Word, by being steeped in his Word, by being active in his work, and being often in his presence.

[23 : 30] Often in the presence of God. And then we find that love for Jesus and our relationship with Jesus, it blossoms so meaningfully.

Some people say that we love to speak of those we love. And of course we do. We might even bore some to tears when we talk about our children or our grandchildren or the things that take up most of our attention and our time and our passion.

But if this is so, and if the gospel is so great, and our admiration of God is so wonderful, wonderful, well, when did we last tell someone the old, old story of Jesus and his love?

When did you last do that? When did you go out with a message? When did you turn to the person who was sitting beside you? The person who was across from you?

The person who was so heartbroken and downcast and dispirited? The person who was making a mess of things? If Jesus is all that we claim that he is, when did we last tell someone about Jesus?

[24 : 54] I know it's not always easy. I'd be the first to admit that. And even in our own day, it becomes more difficult. And we might want to say, well, it can be so embarrassing to speak about these things today because people are so hard.

And they will mock us, and they will resent us, and they will ridicule us, and they will do all of these things. You can be sure of that. At some point, if you're going to be speaking for Jesus, that will be your experience.

And they will hurt our feelings, and we don't like to have our feelings hurt. None of us like that. But what about Jesus?

Does Jesus have feelings? I wonder what Jesus felt that day as he trudged under the weight of the cross through the streets of Jerusalem and along the Via Dolorosa, as he left that trail of sweat and blood in his wake, as he made his way to Calvary?

What did he feel as he made his way to the place of the skull to die the death of the damned, in an atmosphere of evil, as the powers of darkness were equipped up into a frenzy, the crowds beginning to hiss and to spit like devils on the only righteous man that this world has ever known, as he took our place before God in punishment, that we might take his place before God in righteousness?

[26 : 28] The great transaction. But his feelings hurt. I'm sure he felt pain like no one ever felt pain. Not just physical pain or mental pain or emotional and spiritual pain, but pain of such an intensity that we cannot even begin to imagine these things in this service this evening.

There are some who try and they write wonderful words and we sometimes sing them. We may not know, we cannot tell what pains he had to bear, but we believe it was for us he hung and suffered there.

You know, there are some who are given to understand can go through life without ever really feeling or experiencing the warmth and the care and the love of another human being.

But there's none will go through it without being loved with great passion by Jesus Christ. That's a great message for some folk.

That can turn a life around and give a sense of purpose to a life that is otherwise almost dead. We have the information.

[27 : 48] We have the evidence. We have the power and we have the person of Jesus through the Spirit. We have the ability to exercise this ministry as we prayerfully witness for him here in time.

The marvel of the cross. Then there's the problem of the cross, though. The problem of the cross, it seems to me, is its brutality. And anytime you preach on it, it can evoke all kinds of different emotions in different quarters of any audience.

and the problem is the brutality of it all, and there are folks who will say, well, if that is what God is like, they obviously don't understand it adequately, but if that is what God is like, I want nothing to do with Him. If He would do that to His own Son, why would I want to have anything to do with a God like that? And that's like saying, well, if the Son is the cause of cancer and suffering and so many different lives, I don't want anything to do with the Son, or if the rain is the cause of flood and the lack of water the cause of drought and so much suffering and loss and death and pain and all else, I don't want anything to do with it. Well, you cannot not have something to do with it. We cannot live without the Son. We cannot live without the light. We cannot live without water. And we certainly cannot opt out of having not just anything but everything to do with Almighty God and to have it to do with Him on His terms, not our terms.

When we understand it correctly, we realize that without Christ and the cross, the world would have no light. It would have no hope. It would have no future. When we read the Word of God, we soon discover that God's holy sense of justice demands that sin should be punished and the wages of sin is death. But what God's justice has demanded, God's love has provided and provided it in Himself, in His Son. And that's the marvel and the mystery of grace. Jesus is God. And if you listen to the cries of the Christ of Calvary, as He pays for our sin, it's not resentment or anger that we feel towards God, but gratitude of heart, a sense of a heart melting warm for the awesome love of a self-sacrificing God who has loved and has given Himself even for me. She has for you to deal with our sin. See, if the cross is a problem, sin is a problem too.

And you know, the problem with sin is that it is personal. And we're coming to a close. But sin is personal. Sometimes these days, even in our churches, we can hear folks speak about sin as though it's something that is out there in the atmosphere. It's something that affects us.

[31 : 10] It's something that we have no control over. It's something that we really don't have too much to do with. But yet, when we read the Bible and understand it in the way that God would have us to understand it, we would need to recognize that there hasn't been a single sin that was ever committed from the beginning of time to this hour or will be to the very end of time. But that sin has actually got somebody's name attached to it. Every single one. It is personal, profoundly personal.

We cannot get away from it unless, of course, we take it to Jesus. No sin is so small that it can be ignored. No sin so great that it cannot be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. And one sin always, always, always leads to another. If you're troubled by these things, at any time the thing to do is not to ignore it, but take it to the Christ of Calvary, that He might cleanse it, that He might deal with it. It's really important that we do that.

Because if you don't do that, I assure you that Satan can use it and will use it to torment you and to ruin your relationship, if at all possible, with the Lord Jesus Christ, to come between you and God, to destroy your peace, to deny your joy, joy in the Lord, and to ruin your witness.

So, we come tonight to the cross of Calvary, to be cleansed of our sin, to be set free from our burdens, to arise from this service to go out with a sense of freshness and a sense of freedom, a knowledge that we have been forgiven, a knowledge that we will stay forgiven, a knowledge that it satisfies and pleases the living God to come among us and to cleanse us, and to send us out with a new song in our mouths as we began our service by singing, to let the world and the Lord see the transforming power of the cross of Jesus, the effect of the cross in the life of the cross of Jesus Christ in the gospel.

Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. Let Him touch your heart. Let Him transform your life.

[34 : 15] Let Him fill you with the assurance that He will also transport your soul in our rapture of delight into His presence in the glory and the fullness of His time. That's the message. That's why we worship.

That's why we serve. That's why we continue to fight against all the odds. That's why we put the fundamentals of the faith ahead of everything else that might threaten to divide us.

Jesus is Lord. Let us pray.