

# Matthew 21:1-11

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] we read first of all about the triumphal entry that event that took place which marked the beginning of jesus passion the events that would culminate in his crucifixion on the cross and that would mean his death eventually next week i want us to conclude the story on easter sunday by thinking about the triumph of the resurrection but there would be no resurrection without the death the resurrection is meaningless without the death the death itself was necessary and the new testament goes into great detail about the events that led up to the crucifixion of jesus and the crucifixion itself it also goes into great detail about the reason why it was absolutely necessary for jesus to die and i want us to keep that in mind it wasn't an accident that jesus died on the cross it was planned by god himself and every event that took place all the details they all happened as they were planned and purposed by god that's the most remarkable thing that none of this was by accident even the very details the people the conversations the events that led up to his crucifixion i want us to be reminded of them now by by way of just condensing them the whole story if you read through the gospel accounts of jesus life what you'll find is that there's a remarkable change between the speed at which the gospels tell about the miracles the life the ministry of jesus and these events it's almost like like donna mcleod says it goes into slow motion whenever the crucifixion is spoken about there's a frame by frame account all of a sudden we're focused and it's like every hour is recorded for us so that we become eyewitnesses almost to these crucial happenings these crucial yet unpleasant happenings it's not easy to watch someone suffering and the cross is not a pleasant read because it's about injustice and evil it's about hatred it's about a whole crowd of people who turned against someone who never did them any harm who only went about doing good and someone moreover that they had come to believe was their messiah and yet here they are calling for his blood calling for his crucifixion so these events are are all important i want us to just just reflect on on them perhaps home in on one or two of them just to get the story once again sometimes we need to get the big picture well i hope that that's what we do this morning as we reflect once again on the death of jesus there was the last supper again jesus made a point of preparing his disciples for it they were to go and ask a unidentified man where they would go to prepare the last supper or the passover that jesus was so eager to

celebrate with his disciples sure enough they found this man and he showed them the upper room and this was where the very first communion was celebrated it was of course the time of the passover that moment when the people of israel they remembered their history and particularly that occasion when god had delivered their forefathers from slavery in egypt but he did so in a particular way remember the plagues in exodus chapter 11 the 10 plagues culminating in the 10th which was the plague against the firstborn because of pharaoh and the egyptians refusal to allow the israelites to leave egypt god punished them by sending plagues and the last one was the worst of all one in which god the angel of death visited every home in egypt putting to death the firstborn however the way of escape for the israelites was to take a lamb and they were to kill that lamb the lamb was to be a year old it was to be without blemish they were to kill the lamb and they were to paint the blood of the lamb on the doorpost and they were to roast it and eat it along with bitter herbivores unleavened bread and that night when the angel of the lord passed through egypt if he saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts he would not put the firstborn to death that was their means of escape by listening to god and his warnings they were to escape there was a way of escaping the punishment that everyone every household deserved in egypt thus the people of israel were delivered and saved from the wrath and the anger of god every year the people of israel remembered that night the night that god had saved them and delivered them by setting them free from the oppression and the cruelty of the israelite of the egyptians and this was that time of the year when jesus was eager to celebrate the passover with his disciples but not just as a looking back to the past remarkably jesus was looking to what lay in front of him imminently his death on the cross and he describes it in terms of what they were doing in celebrating the passover it came down to bread and wine and the bread he described as my body which is broken for you the wine he described as his blood that was shed for the remission of sins what he's doing there is he's saying that his death that is just about to happen on the cross has got to be understood in terms of the sacrifice that took place at the time of the passover remember what we said that the means that god chose to deliver his people israel from the cruelty of the egyptians was that instead of the firstborn being put to death the lamb was put to death as a substitute and the lamb by being put to death suffered the consequence of sin that was what sacrifice was all about in any case it was a substitute it was where an animal was put to death

instead of the person so here is Jesus and he's describing his own imminent suffering and death as sacrifice as that lamb it's not the first time that he's described as the lamb remember when John the Baptist saw him at the very beginning he said behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world so therefore the Passover that Jesus celebrated with his disciples it provided the context in which he was able to describe and explain what was going to happen his death was not going to be an accident his death was planned and purposed by God because he was the ultimate one and only sacrifice by which we would be delivered from the anger and the punishment of God and so that was the last supper that moment when Jesus remembered how God had delivered his people in the past but looked forward to what God was going to do in his death and then immediately after the last supper you remember how Jesus went out to a special place called the Garden of Gethsemane must have been a beautiful place a place that Jesus frequented often and he went there specifically to pray but this was an occasion like no other this was immediately prior to his arrest and Jesus was aware of the horror of what lay in front of him so as he prayed that night uppermost on his mind the only thing on his mind is what he is about to suffer his suffering has already begun and he's been brought to that point where he prays these words Father if it be possible remove this cup from me yet nevertheless not my will but yours be done and we read that he was in such agony such distress of mind that as he sweated his sweated were like great drops of blood this was a singular moment this was a unique occasion this was an awful moment in the experience of the Lord Jesus Christ as he contemplated as he stood on the threshold of unimaginable agony and pain I want us to think of that moment as he looked into the abyss into the darkness the loneliness the isolation of what lay ahead of him he was completely alone and that's because only he could be that sacrifice only he could bear our sin and become guilty of our unrighteousness he alone was good enough to open the door of heaven and then the next thing that happened of course was his arrest there and then as he emerged from the garden a crowd of his opponents came to arrest him and to take him away

to first of all the Sanhedrin the Jewish ruling council who accused him of all kinds of crimes against their religion that he was that he was supposed to have committed of course these were false accusations he was then sent to Pilate and every detail there are so many apparently incidental details but when you put them all together when you examine them they're all part of the story all of them written down for a reason God doesn't want to leave anything out he wants us to know he wants us to know exactly what people are saying what's going on just before Jesus is crucified there's that moment for example when as Jesus is being interrogated by Pontius Pilate the Roman governor

Pilate's wife sends him a message and says look I've had a dream because of this man I've had a dream about Jesus don't take anything to do with him I am deeply troubled there were incidents like that that add weight to the poignancy of the moment there was the fact that Jesus was handed over by one of his own disciples one of his own friends betrayed him Jesus knows what betrayal is we can't say to Jesus you don't know what I'm going through Jesus knows the awfulness the disappointment the sadness of someone he counted as a friend and who is now his enemy who turns out not to have been a friend at all and then there is of course there's the trial by Pilate at which he is forced to make a decision between who he's going to please is he going to do what is right and set free a man he knows has not committed any crime nothing has been proved against him or is he going to please the people who are calling out for Jesus' blood crucify him crucify him of course

[ 14 : 34 ] Pilate capitulates and does the easy thing takes the path of least resistance even although he knows that it's the wrong path he condemns him to be crucified but it's not only that he was going to be crucified before he was put to death he was mocked in the most shameful manner he was beaten he was flogged he was stripped he was exposed to everyone and then he was taken and made to carry his own cross to the place called the place of the skull and there almost incidentally we're told in Matthew's gospel they crucified him you can only imagine the agony on a human level on a physical level that that must have involved

I can't imagine it somebody said once that whoever invented the crucifixion as an execution method must have been the most incredibly cruel person someone else said once that whoever died by crucifixion died a thousand deaths that's only on the human level we're going to come to the divine level in a few moments time but let's stick with the facts as they happen as he is hanging in agony on the cross he's heard to say seven things don't have time to explore them all but it's worth mentioning them he's heard to cry I am thirsty reminding us of the humanity of Jesus of the utter humiliation of being deprived of even the most basic needs he's heard to say father forgive them for they do not know what they do somehow even in their immense cruelty and in the fact that they're rejoicing at the death of an innocent man they still haven't got it they haven't grasped the scale the sheer scale of what they're doing this is not a normal crucifixion crucifixions were happening all the time by the way it wasn't an uncommon thing but this one was different here was none other than

God himself now there's no way even although the people knew that they were putting to death an innocent man and that in itself was a horrendous horrendously unjust thing to do but they did not know the scale of what they were doing this wasn't just an innocent man wasn't just a unique individual wasn't just a religious leader this was none other than the son of God himself and then remember how he spoke to the thief remember how he was crucified in the middle of two thieves and at first both of these thieves derided him somehow in their agony and in their stress they mocked him but then remarkably one of them changed his mind something happened in one of the thieves he saw something even in his agony it's hard to see it's hard to reason anything when you're in agony it must be incredibly difficult but somehow this man saw something in Jesus that changed him altogether and he began to rebuke the other thief began to tell him to be quiet maybe the reality of what lay imminently in front of him struck home he was just about to die and that makes all the difference doesn't it he's just about to breathe his last but there's more to it he recognises that there is something in

Jesus that is truly divine truly righteous truly perfect and so he turns to him in faith as it turns out and he asks Jesus to have mercy on him remember me he said when you come to your kingdom and Jesus turned to him undeserving as he was and he said today I tell you you will be with me in paradise that's a loaded statement by the way it's a loaded promise not only was it the promise that this man needed to hear and a promise that was ultimately fulfilled and kept because that man even in his dying moment was saved he was forgiven he was transformed he was born again and when that man did breathe his last the next thing he saw was the face of God himself in paradise in heaven it's a loaded statement also because it tells us what happened immediately after Jesus died there's some suggestion that

Jesus went to hell his soul went to hell when he died but these words tell us otherwise they tell us that when Jesus died he went to paradise and that fits with other things that he said particularly in his prayer in John 17 father I come to you there are all kinds of interesting truths that are raised by these events another saying of Jesus was towards his mother poor mother who had loved him all her life and had brought him up who had given birth to him in the first place in the most extraordinary circumstances she was there watching him being put to death must have been such a traumatic moment for poor Mary she watched her son must have been a confusing moment for her and the rest of the disciples we'll go into that in a few moments time but even in his agony he has time to and he has the thought the presence of mind to make provision for his mother by providing for her the care that she needed and then he said this in the pinnacle of his agony in the darkness the dereliction of his suffering you remember how he cried my God my God why have you forsaken me and at that moment we believe this was the very the very depths the deepest moment of his suffering when he's unable so any longer to call God his father it's not because God ceased to be his father it's because

[ 22 : 23 ] God has lost that Jesus is so consumed by the darkness and the pain and the dereliction the loneliness the suffering he is so consumed by the wrath of God we'll go into that in a few moments time that all he can cry is my God my God why have you forsaken me that is the moment in which God the father in his holiness because Jesus has become guilty of our sin he turns his back turns his face away and it was after that moment that Jesus reaches the point of death itself and as he reaches that point he prays once again and this time he uses the word father once again father into your hands

I commit my spirit again a loaded statement because he's describing the fact that his death was like no other death this death is unique because it is utterly voluntary when you and I come to die whenever that is it will not be voluntary our life will be taken from us that's what happens when anyone dies their life is taken from them we don't have the control over life and death but Jesus did and when it came for him when it came the moment for him to die he died by laying down deliberately and voluntarily laying down his life and that's important because it means that at every moment he never loses control over what is happening even the moment of his death it's important also to remember that death itself was the end point it had to be like that he couldn't stop short well on the one hand he had the power at any moment to call a halt to the whole thing he didn't he chose not to and entered into death itself because of the necessity of paying for our sin the last words of

Jesus of course were it is finished again a loaded statement that means more than my suffering has now come to an end it means that everything has now been accomplished everything that was planned by God himself has now reached its terminus the price has been paid the Lamb of God has laid down his life the sacrifice has now been offered all that remains is that final moment of separation when Jesus the Son of God dies it's important for us to understand not only that

Jesus death was deliberate and planned not only was it arranged by him by God but it's important to understand why it had to be that way because otherwise there is this irreconcilable paradox I mean how can God die how can the Son of God who his friends his disciples had come to believe was the Messiah was the Son of God after all when you think about it here's the same man who he spoke to the wind remember that time when he crossed the Sea of Galilee and a storm came up and the disciples were in fear of their lives the waves were coming into the boat the boat was sinking Jesus was asleep he woke up and he just spoke to the wind and the waves he just spoke and instantly the storm abated it was calm the disciples were saying who is this he can even speak to the wind and the waves and they obey him and time after time he demonstrates his authority changes water into wine he walks on the water he raises the dead

I mean who can do that without having the power of God himself it was abundantly clear that this was no other ordinary man no one had ever walked the surface of the earth with this kind of power before he truly was the son of God and his disciples have come to see that and understand it now how can you take this man who has such authority and watch him being arrested and stripped and mocked and crucified and how can you watch him die how can this be it's a paradox unless you understand that it was all part of the plan of God and it goes back to what I said before you understand the death of Christ not just by reading the

[ 28 : 42 ] New Testament but by reading the Old Testament that describes God's provision for the forgiveness of sin this is all about us being forgiven by God God's provision was that instead of us having to suffer his justice we all deserve to suffer the justice of God if any one of us had to suffer the justice of God we would be punished by God and the Bible says the death is the wages of sin now here's what Jesus does he comes into the world as God himself and he demonstrates his power his authority his being but then he's crucified he suffers and the

Bible goes on to say that it was as the sacrifice for our sin that he had to die here's the way that the Apostle Paul puts it he who knew no sin Jesus was made to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him now here's what this means Jesus the perfect son of God became so identified with us and our sin God took our guilt and he placed it on Jesus so that Jesus became guilty for our sins and as the person who was guilty for our sin he suffered what we deserve instead of us sacrifice that's that's what sacrifice means and here is the way that

God made his own son to be the ultimate sacrifice why did he do that why did he do that because of his love for a lost and a helpless and a condemned world and you and I are part of that world so the gospel has a bearing in our lives if you listen to what the bible says to it I hope you do then you will realise that this is the greatest truth in all the world of course you can choose to walk away from it and turn your back on it I hope you don't and I hope you see with me that out of everything that is important today nothing is as crucial as this here is where God takes our sin upon himself and suffers instead of us and doesn't hold back but enters into death itself so that we can live and we can be set free now here's what God does he says to us as we come to him in faith and as we accept this gift that he has died to give us

God says to us because Jesus has died instead of you you're set free you're forgiven you're washed you're cleansed you're changed I'm going to give you a new life a new beginning a life that will never end that's why the gospel is so important because it's about life the life that God gives us and so that's why the gospel is such a joy that's why we want to come together and worship because we've been reconciled to God and we've been we've discovered who God really is we've come into a relationship with him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that's why the story that we have just read is not finished we're going to finish it next week we're going to we've looked at the events that surround the death of Jesus now today and hopefully

I've been able to explain something of what they mean and I hope that God speaks to you through that because this is how God speaks to us through his son Jesus Christ and through your discovery of what his death has done for you but next week is Easter Sunday and we're going to see how God brings this whole series of events to a conclusion it didn't end with the death of Jesus Jesus rose again on the third day to prove once and for all that his death had been accepted by God on our behalf and so with great joy we're going to celebrate together I suppose there's a sense in which we ought to be doing that every Sunday and indeed every day I hope we do but next Sunday is Easter Sunday and we're going to think together of what the resurrection truly means and what the risen life of Jesus teaches us let's pray together our father thank you so much for speaking to us in

[ 34 : 49 ] Jesus death thank you for its reality thank you that he was willing to go through the agony of the cross because he loved his people so much to bring them out of darkness and to give them newness of life so father bring this truth to us in your own power in Jesus name amen