

The Hour has Come - Death

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 20th of March 2005. The preacher is Rod McArdle.

His sermon is entitled The Hour Has Come, Death and is based on John chapter 19 verses 17 to 30.

Tragedy One word. Tragedy. That was the headline on the front page of the tabloid. Just one word.

One word used to describe the startling news of the death of that Australian pop star export, Morris Gibb. What's in a word?

You might recall in December 1998 the impeachment of Bill Clinton. It was a historical event. Never before encountered by any living American. And the story was big.

[1 : 03] And the newspapers responded with big headlines. And the biggest one line headline was simply a single word. Impeached.

And it was in large letters of about eight centimetres deep. One word. A word that conveyed profound meaning. The possibility of being removed from presidential office.

A word that brought to stark public attention. The disgrace being borne by the whole Clinton family. Some words convey very powerful messages, don't they?

If you think of a courtroom scene. The pronouncement of guilty or not guilty. Perhaps in a few months time Michael Jackson will have one of those pronouncements and he will either walk away free or he'll face maybe up to 20 years imprisonment.

Some words are stunning in what they convey. They in fact arrest our very attention. And scripture has many of those words. Words like dead, sinner, forgiven, alive.

[2 : 12] And so as we come to our passage in John 19 this morning, we're confronted by perhaps the greatest single word ever spoken. You might like to turn to that passage on page 881 as we work through this part of John 19.

You recall that last Sunday in the first part of John 19, Jesus is passive before Pilate. But this passivity we shouldn't take as one of a helpless victim.

Look at verse 11. Jesus answers Pilate, You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above. And so as we come today to this scene of crucifixion, we're reminded of Jesus' own words back in John chapter 12.

Where he says, And I, when I'm lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. And he said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Jesus is in fact lifted up just as he had predicted. And so at the end of verse 16, we read that the soldiers took Jesus and he carried his own cross.

[3 : 24] Of course, this was part and parcel of Roman practice. The condemned criminal would bear the cross member, the horizontal bar on their shoulders and they would bear it to the place of execution.

Where there would be an upright beam already in the ground and it would be a post of maybe just a little short of three metres high. And the victim was made to lay on the ground on their back and their arms were then stretched out and either tied or nailed to that cross beam.

The cross beam was then hoisted up along with the victim and then it was fastened to that vertical post. The victim's feet were either then tied or nailed to the post.

So John records, and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called the place of the skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. Now this place of crucifixion known as Golgotha is somewhat uncertain.

Most likely it was just outside the wall of Jerusalem, perhaps not far from a road. It's suggested that today it's probably very near the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

[4 : 32] And so here in this extremely public place, Jesus was crucified. It was a punishment of extreme shame and horror. Indeed, it was only with the emperor's sanction that a Roman citizen could be crucified.

And Cicero describes crucifixion this way. He says, It is that cruel and disgusting penalty. Jesus is crucified between two others.

Matthew and Mark identified them as bandits, possibly insurrectionists, perhaps like Barabbas. And it was common custom for the person being crucified to have written on a tablet, on a placard, the crime for which they'd been found guilty.

And it was often placed around their neck on their way to the place of execution. And then it was fastened to the cross. So John records, verse 19, Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross.

It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. And it was written in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek.

[5 : 48] Written in three languages. Hebrew, or as that word is used in the New Testament, Aramaic, the common language through Judea. Latin, the official language of the Roman Empire.

And Greek, the international language of that region and the empire, well known throughout the land of Palestine. And John has been developing this theme of Jesus' kingship right through chapters 18 and 19.

And as we've been so wonderfully reminded of this morning in the kids' talk. And so this placard, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, firstly, it reveals that Jesus was found guilty of sedition, of treason.

It's ironic. He's being executed for being the King of Israel even though the leaders of the nation rejected His kingship. Of course, on Palm Sunday, Jesus had been welcomed in that triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem.

And that's recorded in John chapter 12. And he'd been welcomed as a royal aspirant. But now, now he's on the way to the cross.

[6 : 58] Well, secondly, that wording on the placard was part of Pilate's revenge. Revenge against the Jews for forcing his hands in seeking to crucify Jesus.

Pilate had already taunted the Jews back in verse 14. He says, well, here's your king. It's as if Pilate is mocking their pragmatic allegiance to Caesar by presenting this beaten up Galilean as their king.

In verse 21, the chief priest of the Jews said to Pilate, do not write the King of the Jews. But this man said, I am the King of the Jews. Pilate answers, what I have written, I have written.

And so, thirdly and importantly, the placard serves God's ends. Because the Lord Jesus is indeed the King of the Jews. The cross is the very means of Jesus' exaltation and the very manner of his glorification.

And that placard in the three languages, I'd suggest, symbolically pictures his universal kingship. On the cross, Jesus indeed draws all people to himself, just as he predicted in John chapter 12.

[8 : 17] Verse 23, when the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic.

Now the tunic that was seen was woven in one piece from the top. And so they said to one another, let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it. You see, Roman law actually allowed the execution squad to seize the possessions, the few possessions of the condemned person.

And so these soldiers, they tear Jesus' outer garment into pieces. But they cast lots for his undergarment. The scene is one of Jesus left hanging naked on the cross.

What humiliation was heaped upon the very Son of God. This pathetic, this merciless act of the soldiers was however the fulfilment of prophecy.

Look at the end of verse 24. This was to fulfil what the scripture says. They divided my clothes among themselves and for my clothing they cast lots. I mean, was this the soldier's intent to fulfil scripture?

[9 : 30] Absolutely not. But God's mysterious sovereignty was clearly at work. And the scripture that's cited there is Psalm 22 verse 18.

And it uses the exact words out of the Greek Old Testament. It's a picture of abandonment. And it's important for John who's presenting to a Jewish audience his gospel to ground the events of Jesus' passion in the Old Testament.

Because the idea of a crucified Messiah to a Jew in the first century was absolutely alien. And so throughout his gospel John emphasises again and again that Jesus' passion and Jesus' death occurred in accordance with the will of God.

And for example, back in chapter 2 after Jesus cleanses the temple the Jews ask him what sign can you show us for doing this? And Jesus answered them destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up.

And the Jews then said this temple has been under construction for 46 years and you'll raise it up in three days. But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

[10 : 52] These soldiers were acting out of the custom the Roman custom and they were acting in accordance with their evil desires but unwittingly they were fulfilling God's unbreakable word.

Well verse 25 stands in sharp contrast to verse 23 and 24 because you see on the one hand you've got these soldiers who are seeking to profit at Jesus' expense and yet on this other hand there's this picture of four women waiting at the scene of the crucifixion there in faithful devotion four women Jesus' mother her sister Mary Magdalene who we know from Luke chapter 8 Jesus had previously exercised out of her seven demons and Mary the wife of Clopas if you picture that in your mind I'm sure you'd agree this is a very moving scene because you have Jesus dying this most horrid ignominious death and his mother there to see it and Jesus looks down at his mother and says woman here is your son so here's Jesus he's suffering on the cross and this is not just physical suffering this is bearing the sin of the world and concerned for the future care of his mother and he assigns to the disciple who he describes as the one who he loves which we take to be John he assigns to John the care of his mother and this is just one of many many examples in scripture of the compassionate heart of God yes God because this is

God in Christ this is God incarnate dying on the cross and after Jesus expresses his concern for his mother knowing that all was now finished Jesus utters the words I'm thirsty and we're reminded aren't we of Jesus' humanity in those words just as we're reminded back in chapter 4 when Jesus requests the drink of the Samaritan woman and it's critical to understand this aspect of Jesus' humanity because there would be no salvation for anyone if the humanity of Jesus Christ was not real humanity all of us have sinned against God God's justice demands that humanity pay the penalty of sin and the penalty can be paid by each of us as individuals or as a substitute and Jesus came as our substitute the one who died on the cross as our substitute was God in Christ truly and fully both God and man and that makes him uniquely qualified to be the one and only mediator in Jesus' utterance

I am thirsty fulfills scripture because again John is emphasizing this fulfillment theme back in Psalm 69 21 we read these words for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink because in the Psalms in this case David and his experiences they act as a prophetic model if you like they act as a type of David's greater son the Lord Jesus Christ Jesus is actively working at his death to make sure it's exactly what the father had promised it would be and the soldiers they take a sponge of sour wine and they place it on Jesus' mouth and they use a branch of hyssop to do that and the very use of hyssop invokes in our mind doesn't it the picture that we see in the book of Exodus because in Exodus chapter 12 we read that hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood on the doorpost and the lintel at the first Passover and the

Passover and the Exodus from Egypt were both real historical events but they're both also pictures they're types of a greater and future reality and Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 7 says that Jesus is the Passover Lamb the one who voluntarily sacrifices himself to provide redemption to free us from the deadly the fatal bondage of sin for who for all who place their faith and trust in him well having received the sour wine on the branch of hyssop Jesus cries out it is finished and it's a cry of victory it is finished and as we think of that expression maybe we ask what is it that is finished because certainly that expression encompasses the earthly ministry and life of

[15 : 57] Jesus Jesus had been born without the benefit of a human father just as prophesied in the book of Isaiah he was born of the seed of Abraham the lion of David born in Bethlehem all prophesied in the Old Testament his miracles have been foretold in Isaiah 35 his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the Sunday have been foretold in Zechariah 9 he was to be hated as we read in Psalm 69 a friend would betray him as we read in Psalm 41 he was numbered with the transgressors Isaiah 53 he was pierced through his hands and his feet Psalm 22 and his clothes his garments were divided also as predicted in Psalm 22 so all of this all of this had been completed nothing that was to be fulfilled in the life and ministry of the Messiah was left lacking in Jesus but friends the primary reference of that cry the primary reference is to the atonement this is not a cry of defeat it's not just simply a pronouncement of his imminent death although certainly the cry encompasses that fundamentally the cry is a cry of accomplishment it is finished and it's just one word in the Greek teteletsai you don't have to know

Greek to be a Christian but if you want to know one word in the Greek can I suggest this is the word to remember teteletsai I want to suggest this is the greatest single word ever uttered on the earth this word teteletsai it was written on business documents it was written on receipts in the New Testament times and it showed that the debt had been paid in full and of course to John's readers this word would have had rich meaning to them it would have been unmistakable that Jesus Christ had died to pay for their sins and the tense of this word this verb is particularly important the sense is this it has been and will continue to be finished Jesus had accomplished what he came into the world to do Jesus had accomplished what the father sent him into the world to do he had come to bring fulfillment to the Old

Testament law he had come to bear the sin of the world to deliberately freely and in perfect love endure the judgment in our place so that divine judgment was satisfied he came to procure salvation for us he came to establish a new covenant between God and humankind and to make available the chief covenant blessing as we've sung this morning the forgiveness of sins the Lamb of God had indeed taken away the sins of the world there was nothing more on earth for him to do nothing more for him to do except to die so that he might rise again imagine taking a brush and take that brush and seek to add some features to that extraordinary portrait of the Mona Lisa think about doing that it's kind of absurd isn't it

I mean it's a masterpiece nothing needs to be added to it but in an infinitely greater way that's the same in Jesus atoning work nothing needs to be added to it nothing can be added to it not our good works not any particular religious ceremony all of the religions of the world can be summed up just in one word and the word is do and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ also can be summed up in one word done Jesus offers salvation in every sense that is complete we can contribute absolutely nothing nothing at all to our salvation back in 1132 AD there were 13 monks from the Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire and they were given some bleak land and the Fountains Abbey monks they built a monastery there and they dedicated themselves to prayer to hardship to severe self-discipline abstaining from all sorts of pleasures they wanted to live like hermits why?

to seek the salvation of their souls they ate only enough to keep themselves alive they purified their bodies by full blood lettings every year they held seven services of a night and a night vigil it started at 2.30 in the morning it went for an hour and a half then they had to stay awake until dawn and they had to sit in a particular way so it was obvious if they started to doze off to sleep this is an extraordinary amount of effort isn't it seeking the salvation of their souls and they were wrong they were absolutely wrong in thinking that any of their efforts could save them could bring them salvation friends there is absolutely nothing that we can contribute to our salvation it's all of grace God loved us and in loving us he came to us in Christ he pursued us he pursued us even to the desolate anguish of the cross and it was on the cross where he bore our sin where he bore our guilt our death and our judgment how do we then respond to such love as we see in this this love to the undeserving this love to the undeserving like you and me this is grace the reality is we can't change the fact that each of us are sinners sinners and as sinners there are only two choices either we pay the penalty ourselves for our sin and that is eternal death eternal separation from God or we can accept

[22 : 32] Christ's payment when he sacrificed himself in each of our places and receive eternal life the cleansing the forgiving blood of Jesus Christ is effective for every person in the world but it will only be applied to your account and to my account it will only totally remove your debt of sin and my debt of sin if by faith we trust in Christ as our Saviour and Lord tetaletsai it was the cry of the mighty victor it was indeed a cry of victory the cross is the victory and the resurrection is the triumph the resurrection is the public display of the victory but the victory itself was complete it is finished atonement had been completed fully accomplished once and for all time how do we then respond to a message such as this well I trust that your response is one of a heart of worship and that heart of worship overflows into service to our triune

God but perhaps there are some here this morning who in hearing these words in reality have a deeply convicted heart a deeply convicted heart that you have not trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ that you have not trusted in Christ and in Christ alone well if that is your situation today let me encourage you let me implore you to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ this morning to repent of your sins to cease your rebellion call on the Lord for mercy and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord as we sang in that song lifted up was he to die it is finished was his cry now in heaven exalted high hallelujah what a Saviour let me pray dear heavenly father we thank you for your extraordinary love that you sent the Lord

Jesus Christ into this world as our Saviour thank you for the gift of the spirit to convict us to challenge us and to transform and regenerate us and thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who bore our sin in his own body on the tree thank you that he was completely in charge of all of those events thank you that his cry from the cross teteletsai just so wonderfully expresses the completeness the totality of atonement found only in the Lord Jesus Christ Lord I pray for the great many that are here this morning who love the Lord Jesus Christ that again afresh this morning our hearts would well up with great thankfulness and worship and Lord for any of you here this morning who in hearing these words as the spirit brings these words to their heart and know that they are not trusting in Christ

Lord I pray that they would yield to the Saviour that they would repent of their sins and they would simply place their trust in Christ and in Christ alone we ask these things and give you thanks in the precious and powerful name of our Lord Jesus Christ Amen to His Son and he is forthcoming His son the dryer to their toück and to their hope and he is professing