

10th April 2020 3pm Bible Study of Mark chapters 18 and 19

[Revd. Andrew Attwood:]

Okay we're now live on YouTube so we will be welcoming anybody who's joining us already and for those people involved in being part of the video, we'll make sure that we edit out the first few moments before we properly begin, but it's good to have everyone with us. We'll start formally in a moment.

I was thinking, Catherine, do you have a favourite gospel?

[Catherine Pennington:]

They all have special things for me. I do Luke's gospel, but I mean John has got such riches, even just going through these couple of chapters, you're just remembering things earlier on in the gospel and you sort of see a little bit of that coming back.

[Andrew:]

Absolutely. What about you, James, do you have any favourite Gospels?

[James Pollard:]

Yes, I also quite like John, and we're studying Mark in detail in church this year, so I'm really enjoying that. It's very fast-paced - if you're in a hurry, read Mark!

[Andrew:]

It's the Steven Spielberg of the four Gospels. Yes, absolutely.

[Catherine:]

Luke is always supposed to pay more attention to women and to the more feeble people - well, you know, being a doctor, I think - I think very often done in women's groups, I like, you know, the extra emphasis that you get.

[Andrew:]

Good, yes, I'm a big fan of Mark in particular, at the minute we've been, myself and Michelle, have been working our way through Mark. It's taken us ages but it'll be great to do the final chapter of Mark for Easter Sunday. That would be good.

[Catherine:]

And if you do a Matthew's study with somebody who is even a Messianic Jew, which we had when we lived in Brussels, because you've got so many references back to the Jewish things and views anyway, but, you know, each one is so different so, yes, that's always helpful to bear in mind when you're reading.

[Andrew:]

Yes, absolutely wonderful, wonderful.

So James, where are you at the moment?

[James:]

I'm currently in Durham. In fact I discovered that I think my house is almost exactly north of my house in Kenilworth, so yes, there's a fun fact, but quite a few miles north. It's cold up here! I've been sent photos from back home yesterday - it's sunny!

[Andrew:]

In shirtsleeves yesterday, absolutely. Is the weather good though? Is it sunny?

[James:]

It has been before, and I think it's meant to be, but right now it is quite cloudy. So no, you're living it up down there in the "south", yes.

[Andrew:]

Now guys, it's three o'clock and I'm hoping that people will be joining us now for this Bible study. I'm going to say welcome to everyone. This is an opportunity for myself and Catherine and James to be looking at two chapters of John's gospel on this important day. It's Good Friday, it's an opportunity, folk, to focus in, to zoom in on this particular phase of Jesus' ministry in this significant time. So what we're going to do for the next hour or so, we're going to work our way through sequentially, we're going to do chapter 18 and read it through and then discuss it and then we'll read through chapter 19 and discuss it too.

So let me begin with a prayer, so that for all of us who are listening and for all of us who were studying, hopefully you've got a Bible to hand out there, we can see if God speaks to us as we talk. let me pray:

Lord Jesus, we want to thank you for John's Gospel. We want to thank you for this faithful witness - what happened to you in your final hours leading up to the cross. We pray now that your word would come alive to us.
In Jesus' Name, Amen.

[Andrew:]

Catherine, if you could read to us verses 1 to 11, and then James if you could follow immediately from 12 to 24, and then I'll finish the chapter. So do go ahead Catherine.

[Catherine:]

So we're in John's Gospel chapter 18 beginning at verse 1:

¹ When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.

² Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

⁴ Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want?'

⁵ 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied.

'I am he,' Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶ When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground.

⁷ Again he asked them, 'Who is it you want?'

'Jesus of Nazareth,' they said.

⁸ Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.'⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: 'I have not lost one of those you gave me.'

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?'

[James:]

¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant-girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ 'You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?' she asked Peter.

He replied, 'I am not.'

¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood round a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

¹⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

²⁰ 'I have spoken openly to the world,' Jesus replied. 'I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.'

²² When Jesus said this, one of the officials near by slapped him in the face. 'Is this the way you answer the high priest?' he demanded.

²³ 'If I said something wrong,' Jesus replied, 'testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?' ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

[Andrew:]

²⁵ As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, 'Are you not one of his disciples, are you?'

He denied it, saying, 'I am not.'

²⁶ One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, 'Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?' ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?'

³⁰ 'If he were not a criminal,' they replied, 'we would not have handed him over to you.'

³¹ Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.'

‘But we have no right to execute anyone,’ the Jews objected. ³² This happened, so that the words that Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’

³⁴ ‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’

³⁵ ‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’

³⁶ Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’

³⁷ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate.

Jesus answered, ‘You right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth listens to me.’

³⁸ ‘What is truth?’ retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, ‘I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release “the king of the Jews”?’

⁴⁰ They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.

So that's the end of chapter 18. I'd be very interested to know, James and Catherine, what kind of thoughts come to mind from the early parts of 18. Let's see if we can work through it in sequence: we have the shape of the chapter being [1] the arrest of Jesus and he's taken to Annas, [2] we have this concentrated period with Peter's denials, [3] time with a high priest and then [4] into this exchange with Pilate. What are your first thoughts? What come to mind?

[Catherine:]

It's easy to think that Judas imagined he was going to surprise Jesus. He's coming there in the dark and there's that sort of sense of “ooh, you know, let's get him when he won't know and he'll be taken unawares.” And it just struck me, when you get to verse 4, Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, Judas didn't manage to surprise him, did he?

[Andrew:]

Yes, absolutely. And there's a sense, I think particularly in John's gospel, of Jesus having a tremendous amount of authority all the way through this process. It's a slightly different take from the Synoptics but he seems to know what he's doing and what's going on. James?

[James:]

Yes, and I think that authority really stuck out to me as well. I can easily imagine Jesus almost just kind of getting caught up in it being a surprise, like Catherine said, but it just isn't the case: he's got his face set towards the Cross and he knows he's walking there.

[Andrew:]

Likewise you've got this unusual exchange right at the beginning, where he basically challenges those who are coming and he says, “Who is it you want?” And there's a kind of “I am” phrasing there. I mean what do you make of that exchange he has with his people, the people who are coming to arrest him? What do you make of that?

[Catharine:]

Well you remember the several "I am" phrases that you get earlier in the gospel: "I am the Bread of Life", "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", and so on and somehow there's a sense where you go back to Moses at the Burning Bush: the "I am" gives you that sense of "This is God speaking" and if they were good Jews they would pick up on that, wouldn't they? I think that just normal people don't use it in that way. And their reaction, drawing back and falling to the ground - I thought of Moses falling flat on his face in front of the Burning Bush and he heard God speaking out of it, so there was sort of memories there from the Old Testament.

[Andrew:]

Absolutely.

[James:]

Yes, even in terms of the authority there, "If ye seek me, let these men go!" He's still, in the midst of all that's happening for him, he's still caring for his disciples, he's still got that power like you said.

[Andrew:]

And this seems to be reinforced as well in verse 9 when he's trying to protect them, he says this happens "so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: 'I have not lost one of those you gave me.'", so there's a track you find through the whole of John's gospel where he says, "I only do what the Father tells me" and "I do this to fulfil the Scriptures," so both of those things are the same. And right in the most pressurized of moments, he's still guarding his followers very, very carefully knowing it fulfils ancient prophecy.

[Catherine:]

I was stuck in verse 11, you have the phrase "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" and I went looking back to see if there is a Gethsemane incident, when he's praying quietly and the disciples go to sleep. And it isn't in John's Gospel is it?

[Andrew:]

No.

[Catharine:]

That's the phrase that we get in the Synoptic gospels about "Let this cup pass from me," and to some extent his authority, his power, his control of the situation now is because he has come through that experience even if John doesn't relate it, that, you know, we sense that experience of him coming to terms with "Yes, this this cup cannot pass from me. I'm going to take it and drink it." And the cup mentioned there just again brings you back to memories of earlier passages in the other gospels.

[Andrew:]

Absolutely! Any thoughts on that James?

[James:]

Oh, I was hoping to ask you what you thought the cup was. I was aiming to get there get in there quicker.

[Andrew:]

Okay and right, well, I mean, in some respects there is an echo not only of Gethsemane, there's an exchange that Jesus has with James and John earlier on in, I think it's in the Synoptics more than in John's gospel, where they're wanting to sit on his right and his left in the coming Kingdom, and they've kind of cajoled their mum to kind of put in a word for them, and he asks *them* "Are you able to drink the cup that I shall drink?" and they kind of in a gung-ho way

kind of say, "Yes, yes we can!" They have no idea! They have no idea that he's talking about *this* cup and the references to Gethsemane we find in the other gospels are a fairly agonizing choice that he goes through. I think the Gethsemane portraits that we have in Matthew and Luke and Mark are painful. They're human, yet by the time we get to John's account there is a kind of clarity, there's a resoluteness, there's a kind of "I've made my decision, I know what the Father's will is now, I'm going to down this glass, I'm going to drink this drink," and so there's a soberness about it really, and he embraces it wholeheartedly.

As we move through, we start to see Jesus now arrested. He's bundled off to Annas and then on to Caiaphas. Any any particular comments on the kind of the trials or the conversations he has there, any thoughts?

[James:]

It being the high priest seems a pretty big thing in terms of later on in this passage was saying that Jesus is the true King of the Jews. And the high priest of the Jews being a person who is saying that the King of the Jews should die seems a pretty big clash within terms of what the Kingdom looks like and yes, kind-of Jewishness there.

[Andrew:]

Catherine, any thoughts?

[Catharine:]

I'm always fascinated by the fact that when Jesus speaks out in verses 20, 21 and 22, he's speaking out with confidence saying "Why, you know, I was there in the temple, you could have arrested me anywhere." And then he gets struck by one of the officials. But there's this sense, you know, "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "Well, I didn't really know he was the high priest." And, you know, he isn't somebody that Jesus respects, if you like, in that he knows that he is superior to Annas. But the officials are not impressed, are they?

[Andrew:]

Yes. I mean, again, ironically, you would have heard earlier in John's gospel that the high priest had almost accidentally prophesied, "It's better for one man to die, than for the whole nation to perish." You find that because of his formal role, he actually speaks a word of truth, even though he doesn't know what he's saying. So there's a sense in which we start to get a glimpse of human events happening, but they're ordained from somewhere else. You know, there is there is a guiding hand that's influencing Caiaphas, that's influencing Annas, even though they are free individuals in this whole event - it's remarkable.

What do you guys make of the emphasis on Peter's denials? What do you think about Peter in this chapter?

[James:]

One really interesting thing I saw, that I hadn't noticed before, was when Jesus is saying to the people who've come to arrest him, "I am he," he says that three times, and then when Peter denies three times and twice he says, "I am not," John always sets up such a difference in terms of who's controlling and who's really following what they should be doing, or ... yes.

[Andrew:]

Yes, that's interesting. I've not seen that as a contrast between Jesus' "I am"s and, and Peter's "I am not."

[Catharine:]

I always am aware that at the very end of John's Gospel when Jesus reinstates Peter, and I know that's always three times because of the three denials, But yes, I haven't picked up on the "I am he" three times.

[Andrew:]

Of course, the other parallel regarding Peter in particular is that, you know, in previous verses, in previous chapters, John highlights Peter's resoluteness to say, "I will never leave you, I'm going to go with you all the way to death." I'm often challenged by Peter. I mean, I'm grateful that he humbled himself to make sure all of these frailties were written down for us all, but, of all people, we have the most strident, the most faith-filled disciple who spends three years with the Messiah, and he still crumbles at the last moment. So you have in terms of salvation history, you have the call of Abraham and the beginning of Israel to be the light in the world, and that isn't working and then even when the Messiah comes, he schools his closest followers, and even after three years, his closest, most faith-filled follower is going "No, don't know him, don't know him." And you realise there is a profound fallenness and frailty in every human, no matter what input they have had. Remarkable!

[James:]

And that denial is the first step: John deliberately draws it to a serving girl and that person would have been the lowest of the low, a nobody in society, Peter is desperate to defend his reputation in front of her.

[Andrew:]

Yes. It's embarrassing to read back. But at the same time, you know, there's a lot of soldiers around, you know, the one in whom he has put his trust seems to be suddenly disempowered. It must have been profoundly disorientating for Peter to know what to do.

[Catharine:]

And it seems very brave, really, to go as far as the high priest's house.

[Andrew:]

Yes, it's so hard. Because, you know, he's put all his eggs in one basket, and now every egg seems to be smashing before his very eyes. It's painful. It's really, really hard.

In terms of the conversation then, when you get towards Jesus and Pilate, now this has all kinds of layers of significance. Jesus has been arrested. He's now been scooped through the Jewish, kind of like kangaroo court, really. And now they stick him in front of the secular powers. It's interesting how the trajectory of Jesus is from the Jewish cohort now into effectively the powers of the Empire. What do you make what what are your comments? What are your insights with regards to Jesus and Pilate?

[Catharine:]

Well, even before we get to Jesus and Pilate, the whole hypocrisy of the Jews really jumps out at you. To avoid ceremonial uncleanness they don't want to go into you know, a hidden area but then at the same time they're wanting to commit murder basically, which amongst the 10 commandments, is one that surely they know very well. Yes, it's sort of laughable. It was interesting. I don't know I think it was in the section that James read. Rather than just saying the Jews, I think it was the Jewish officials or the Jewish leaders?

[Andrew:]

Yes.

[Catharine:]

So often we just read Jews, Jews, Jews. And then when you stop and say, well, actually Jesus's disciples were Jews. You know, Jesus was a Jew. And I think we have to then just get back into our mind that this is a small number of the Jews, these Jewish officials, the Pharisees are the ones who are feeling their position threatened.

[Andrew:]

Yes. And I think, I think as well just to pick up on that point about their religious sensibilities, not wanting to become unclean, and yet doing something profoundly unclean, profoundly wicked, and holding those two things at the same time, it's another revelation as to how outward goodness can actually be a complete sham, complete sham.

[James:]

On that, it seems like John's set up those the denials from three different groups of people in life in different ways of being, of not truly living the Jesus king. But there's Peter the kind of seeming to follow him, but then kind of outright denying him. There's that the high priest who's such an authority figure that he's scared, he just cuts him off. And then there's Pilate who's seems a bit of a more muddier person - almost John allows us to empathise with him a bit. In terms of being it doesn't seem he quite wants to go there. But still, in the end, he doesn't stick up for Jesus.

[Andrew:]

Yes. What would you make of Pilate, Catherine? Have you got any perspective?

[Catharine:]

Yes, of his own position anyway, I mean, he's a Roman official. He's a Roman governor, but he's answerable to Caesar up in Rome. You know, if there's a riot on his hands, it won't look good for him, his own career, his own reputation and so yes, I agree though with James that you do feel empathy for him, he knows this man hasn't done anything wrong, and he would love to set him free. And he does try several times, he tries to make this possible. But the Jewish leaders are determined to get their way. And in the end, yes, Pilate is just about ready to give in. That's a very weak thing in the end.

[Andrew:]

Yes. So there's There are all kinds of forces at play within Pilate himself. Let's have a quick look at the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate. Different people have placed different emphasis on this. But in some respects because of the Kingdom language that's embedded into this exchange, this is very much to do with powers, or power with a capital P. Any particular comments on how they talk to each other, or the phrases that are exchanged? What come to mind?

[Catharine:]

Go on, James!

[James:]

The whole language of truth I find interesting.

[Andrew:]

Uh huh?

[James:]

And then, Jesus saying that people who are being true will follow him. And then yes, then Pilate's at the end saying, "What is truth?" always trying to deny that that's a category, so that he doesn't have to kind of, face the horror of what he's about to do.

[Andrew:]

Absolutely, yes. I mean, you sort of pick up a little bit of Imperial pragmatism there. It's like, "Oh, don't talk to me about truth! I just need to sort this problem out." You know, it kind of goes completely over his head, that there's something fundamental being addressed here. And yet Jesus is speaking effectively to the Emperor through Pilate. There's this intriguing phrases you find when again, it's John who's the author of Revelation. And there are certain phrases when you read in Revelation, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God." There is a power-play going on between kingdoms. And Jesus explicitly says, "My kingdom is from another place." I mean, there are sometimes people [who] get confused over what these different terms mean. In verse 36, Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." That doesn't mean "it's not *for* this world," it's just not *from* this world. You know, the kingdom of God is meant to be on earth as it is in heaven. It's just that it operates in a different way to Pilate's kingdom, to Caesar's kingdom. Caesar's kingdom is power and force and oppression. Whereas the kingdom of Jesus Christ is a different kind of Kingdom.

[James:]

And yes, I guess you get you get that picture of what Jesus as a king looks like right here, that he's on his way to sacrifice himself. Yes, what a kingdom that is! That's a kingdom I want to be part of, not the other worldly kingdoms that we're seeing right here.

[Andrew:]

Absolutely! Very, very interesting.

[Catharine:]

That's something that Pilate just cannot conceive of, can he? In the world that he lives in, which, as you say, power is all that matters, he can't see the humility of Jesus as being anything to do with kingship at all,

[Andrew:]

Yes. And yet, there's this kind of retort coming back, it keeps coming back where Pilate says, "You are a king then? You are a king?" There's something almost like a stone in Pilate's shoe - as though he's saying, "I want to get at what's going on here. But you're not the kind of king that I can put into the normal 'king' category." You know, it's not the kind of king he's used to.

Any other general comments from chapter 18, because we've kind of zoomed through it very helpfully. But is there anything else you wanted to say about 18 before we move on to chapter 19?

I think it's probably worth me mentioning John's account. I think you hinted at it earlier, Catherine. John's account includes some details that the other Synoptics don't, and leaves out details that the other Synoptics include. So you get feet washing in John instead of the Last Supper, you know, you get you get Peter's denials in John, but you don't get him going out and weeping bitterly, you know, so there are certain tonal differences between John's gospel and the other gospels. And, and to some extent, I think John almost lets the dialogue tell the story. He just lets the raw facts hits you. I mean, traditionally, that's why on a Good Friday, many churches will go to John's Gospel because they think this is the theatre of the moment. It's almost you're ear-wiggling the actual events. You're a bystander listening to the real dialogue and it hits me, hits me every single time. Yes.

Okay, well, let's move on. Let's move on to chapter 19. And once again, Catherine, if you could read to us, verses one to 16 this time, and James, if you could follow on from 17 to 27, and then I'll finish.

[Catharine:]

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe ³ and went up to him again and again, saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.' ⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!'

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!'

But Pilate answered, 'You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.'

⁷ The Jewish leaders insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.'

⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹ and he went back inside the palace. 'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' Pilate said. 'Don't you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?'

¹¹ Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.'

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.'

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

'Here is your king,' Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!'

'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked.

'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

[James:]

¹⁸ So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, 'Do not write "The King of the Jews", but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.'

²² Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'

²³ 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.

²⁴ ‘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 that said,

‘They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.’

So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son,’ ²⁷ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

[Andrew:]

²⁸ Later, knowing that all was now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken,’ ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, ‘They will look on the one they have pierced.’

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about thirty-five kilograms. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.

[Andrew:]

This is probably one of the most sober pieces of Scripture that we have. So we have the sentencing with yet more exchange between Jesus and Pilate, and Pilate and the crowd. And then we have the crucifixion, the death of Jesus and the burial of Jesus. So again, any initial thoughts regarding the sentencing and handing over? Any thoughts Catherine?

[Catharine:]

It struck me when I was looking through this, when the Jews insisted in verse 7, he claimed to be the Son of God, this really disturbed Pilate. I mean up till now we've been thinking of him, Rome and Roman authority and so on. But if you think of what you know of ancient Rome, they were very superstitious, weren't they? They had all sorts of soothsayers and things like that. So, and isn't there in one of the other gospels, we hear Pilate's wife duly worried, but Pilate himself has been brought up with all this talk of gods responsible and, you know, keeping power over you and so on. So this phrase, the Son of God, is the first time I think that it comes up, in this section?

[Andrew:]

Yes.

[Catherine:]

That just seems to really, really get at him, doesn't it?

[Andrew:]

It's interesting, of course, from a Roman currency point of view, because they were just tiptoeing into deifying Emperors in those days. I mean, it started to become even more strongly pressed historically afterwards. But there were certain coins, where there would be the silhouette of the Emperor. And it would say Son of God ...

[Catharine:]

Really!

[Andrew:]

... on the edges of coins. And so there was a complete dichotomy here, between existing, if you like, earthly deities, and someone claiming to be Son of God with a capital S and G, it's marked again and we have that whole exchange about which king is our king, you know. James Any thoughts?

[James:]

But the thing that really struck me I think, was the chief priests answering, "We have no king but Caesar," the highest religious authority on the holiest night of the year, the Passover, that they are saying that they have no king, but the kind of the worldly Emperor.

[Andrew:]

It is amazing. It's just amazing. I don't know if you were aware of this, it's something that you kind of pick up as you go into depth with Scripture: John places the arrest and final crucifixion of Jesus on the day just ahead of where the other gospels do it. Is it the day after or the day before? I can't remember. But John is trying to synchronise Jesus being sent to the cross at the same time that the lambs would be slaughtered for Passover. You know, it's a slightly different time signature in the other gospels. But there's something clearly poetic about this. You have the high priests saying we have no king but Caesar but now we're going to go and sacrifice our lambs, to make us right with God, not realising, this is the Lamb that is going to be sacrificed to make us right with God. You know the overlap of these two profound things are just painful, painful to look at. They really are.

[Catharine:]

So when it says the day of preparation of Passover week, that is actually the day before?

[Andrew:]

Yes.

[Catharine:]
Okay.

[Andrew:]
And so preparation means we're getting all of the stuff ready, including lambs and things. I mean, just to zoom ahead, to keep the thing going, if you were to look at verse 29, it makes mention of putting a sponge in vinegar, and they hold it up on a hyssop for Jesus to drink. Imagine for a moment Jesus looking at a piece of hyssop: that is what the Israelites would daub their doorposts with, on the actual day of Passover. The blood of the lamb was to go on doorposts with a piece of hyssop. And so here is the Lamb of God with a hyssop in front of his face. And so that whole emphasis of "this means that", "this fulfils that" is starting to be written in very carefully by John.

[James:]
What do you think John's trying to say in saying that Jesus is the Passover lamb?

[Andrew:]
That's, I mean, there are so many kind of echoes here, Catherine, what do you think?

[Catharine:]
Well, I'm just glancing back in John, John chapter one, when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So you've got that in the whole gospel, this emphasis on the lamb?

[Andrew:]
Yes. Running all the way through. In some respects, again, it's kind of ironic that John himself as a gospel writer, doesn't include the Last Supper. But the language of the Last Supper is, "this is my body, this is my blood for the forgiveness of sins" and he's conflating Exodus language and Day of Atonement language all at the same time. Jesus is drawing together ancient themes, ancient symbols and embodying it in himself. So Passover references, Lamb of God. I mean, the thing that's quite poetic of course about this is, Jesus starts to go quiet now. Pilate starts to press him, and Jesus is saying less and less and less. And you get echoes of Isaiah 53, "lead like a lamb to the slaughter, like a sheep that is silent before its shearers." Jesus, I imagine has Isaiah 53 running through his head now, going, "Now's the time to be quiet. Now's the time to say nothing. Now's the time to just let it happen to me." So it's a profound kind of re-enacting of ancient symbols now being fulfilled in himself.

Let's look at the crucifixion itself. Let's look at verses 17 and down. What do you make of this? What are your responses to the sequence to do with the crucifixion?

[James:]
It always kind of breaks me in a way, when I read "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" as a mocking title placed on his head, that, like you said earlier, these people are without knowing it unconsciously, stating the truth and an almost kind of like, heaping judgement on themselves and doing that. They're saying that, they're seeing it by this thing and using it as a way to mock Jesus, rather than using it to submit to Jesus as the true king.

[Catharine:]
I see this as Pilate's little, *little* act of defiance. You said, hey, you've got your way. I've sent him to be crucified, but I'm still not happy about it. So I sort of, what I've written I've written, but this is sort of a "nyeah to you". I mean, "I have actually got what I believe is right, written up above him."

[Andrew:]

Again, ironically, in the same way that the high priest sort of accidentally prophesied, it's better for men to die, Pilate is writing "the King of the Jews" in multiple international languages. And the words, "I'm saying 'he's the king'", to everybody. You know, there's something universal about this kingship and Pilate is inadvertently publicising him to everybody as King. So again, these figures of power, are actually under the guiding hand of God, who is declaring to the world "This is your King. This is your King, who's actually standing in your place, where all of you should be standing, your King is representing you" in the most remarkable and agonising of ways of course.

Of course, I mean, we're Westerners, we don't know what crucifixion is like, however many movies or books we might read. There is something a little sobering about it. You'll find in the Synoptics, and to some extent in this as well, they're brief when they're describing the details. In the Synoptics it'll just say things like, "And they crucified Him" full stop. You know, whereas we have to do some imagining. For a Jew to read "and they crucified Him," their minds would be flooded with a whole series of images and ideas and feelings or even people they had known who were crucified, and it is a heart-rending thing. It is absolutely excruciating. That's where we get the word from.

[James:]

And not only is it physically excruciating, but to the Jews, it was a picture of "by the judgement of God." In Deuteronomy it says, "cursed is every man who hangs on the tree." They're seeing this and they're thinking like, whoa, this guy is under God's judgement. But yes, that's an awful place to be in.

[Andrew:]

Yes, and it was true! I mean, in a "hidden from their eyes" kind of way, but in a profound way, he was becoming cursed. He was feeling... I mean, we will never get our heads around it, but the curse of God was now resting on the shoulders of his Son. Again, there's an echo all the way through this chapter, "for the fulfilment of Scripture", "for the fulfilment of Scripture," just like you said in Deuteronomy, "for the fulfilment of that scripture," the curse is resting on his Son's shoulders now. Extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary.

[Catharine:]

Yes, I often think, when you read the verses of who are standing near the cross, where is Peter now?

[Andrew:]

Yes, good question. Where is he?

[Catharine:]

John is there and we assume John, the disciple Jesus loved, is the one who was with Peter at the high priest's house. There's no mention of Peter now, is there?

[Andrew:]

No. So presumably distraught, gone, run away, hiding. I mean all the rest of the guys apart from John have fled. Yes, there's a painful abandonment that's gone on here, but nevertheless there's some faithful women and there's the disciple whom Jesus loved who's still there. Yes, tell me about your thoughts about the exchanges with Jesus and his mother, the disciple whom he loved. Any either insights or emotional response to that?

[James:]

It just strikes me as incredibly loving that a man undergoing torture is worrying about his mother and how his mother is going to be cared for, and still worried about his people and about John and by making sure that they have a way of caring for each other, going through this.

[Catharine:]

And I think earlier in the gospels, there are occasions when his mother and his brothers turn up. And Jesus basically says, you know, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" because you know, his people following him were closer to him than his natural family. And also there might be a little bit of thinking back, and as he's there on the cross, this is the end, he just knows she's going to need some support. And I mean, we know there were brothers, who by the time we get into the Acts of the Apostles, they were part of the early church. At this point, there's no sign of them being near the cross observing what is happening, but there must be a change a bit later on, before we get to Pentecost and the beginning of the church. This may be the whole thing of the crucifixion and then the resurrection is the turning point for his brothers. We don't know that they all became believers. But we gather some of them did, but John was the faithful one, John was there, John was really good friends who he could know he could entrust his mother to.

[Andrew:]

Yes. Again, I mean, it is incredible as a picture of self-control. You know, those of us who go through suffering ourselves, you become preoccupied with yourself in times of severe difficulty or distress or pain or suffering. And here is Jesus bearing what no-one else can bear, and he still has a moment to sort his mum out. It's just beyond human comprehension. How controlled, how self-aware, how caring this man is. It's beyond anything that anyone else can be really.

So we move to the death of Jesus. And it says in verse 28, "Later, knowing that everything was now completed, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'" Any thoughts on his last moments on the cross?

[James:]

That same kind of, "I thirst" in the context of John's Gospel I found really interesting, that he said, yes, he said to the woman at the well, "the person that that comes to me will never thirst again." But it seems like Jesus is almost thirsting so that we don't have to get thirsty.

[Andrew:]

Yes, you're right. I mean, there are linguistic echoes all the way through. That's really sharp. Really good.

[Catharine:]

And the "It is finished." Again, that made me think back to phrases we had earlier in John chapter 4. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him. He sent me to finish his work."

[Andrew:]

Yes.

[Catharine:]

And in the high priestly prayer, the one then chapter 17, he talks about completing his work, doesn't he? He says, "I brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." So there's again, this sense of Jesus coming to the point of saying, "I have done what I was sent to do. I have completed it." He's not going to die feeling, "I messed it up."

[Andrew:]

No.

[Catharine:]

And it actually challenged me. I mean, we've heard just this week of two people that we know very well who've died, two very elderly people. And I know that

some of them are well prepared for death. They really are, they feel they've done what God gave them to do during their lives. And I think that's a wonderful testimony. That they've served their lives when they really are ready to go. Not everybody gets to that point. But no, it's something when people do.

[Andrew:]

Yes, ending well and ending with a sense of completeness. You probably know this already: I've mentioned it before, but the structure of John's Gospel is built around these seven signs. So before you get to the Passion, the end of the Gospel, you have seven signs that seem to be an echo back to the seven days of Creation. And so now when you get to the culmination of the story with Jesus saying it is finished, there's a sort of parallel to God resting on the seventh day because his work of Creation was finished. This is like Jesus saying, "Done." We're now into new creation. We're now into the completeness of everything God is going to bring out in the new age to come. And so he embraces that, as the one who kind of "signs off". He's saying "All done. All finished." And of course, it says he bows his head and gives up his spirit.

[Catharine:]

Yes, yes, he voluntarily said, "Now is the time."

[Andrew:]

Yes, I mean, that's not what we get to do. I mean, I've sat beside a number of people who have died. You don't get to choose your final breath. But Jesus does. You know? Incredible authority, incredible control.

So we move into the response now. Now that he's dead, what are your thoughts on what happens next?

[Catharine:]

Again, there's that fulfilling prophecies, piercing his side with the flow of blood and water but not breaking his legs. Again, Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled.

[Andrew:]

Yes. I watched an interesting video recently, and I've mentioned it before, "the Bible project" on YouTube, they do lovely, topical or thematic subjects in their videos, and they did one on the "Tree of Life" and "the Water of Life" recently. And part of the video includes this, if you like the new Tree of Life, with water flowing out of it. That is a bit like the Ezekiel river that flows out that's going to be life for the whole world. And here we have a broken man attached to a gibbet and there's clear liquid flowing out of his side. And it's like the author John is saying, "Look, I saw this! We saw this! We want to make sure you know, water came out. This is prophetic. This is an indicator that this is where we will be satisfied," back to what you said earlier, James, about thirst. This is the place where thirst is quenched.

[Catherine:]

That's a really early - I mean, I think about it, we're talking about blood and water coming out of a crucified man. And then we're sort of talking about water first. Yes, that I find very hard.

[Andrew:]

If you think about it, it's the same reaction they had back in John 5 and 6 where he says, "You've got to eat my flesh and drink my blood." And the crowd go, you know, they can't stomach the concept. To be honest, it is difficult. Because to drink this means to accept its necessity.

[Catharine:]

Yes.

[Andrew:]

Yes? To accept we need it. You know? It's the cure is the ultimate vaccine for the ultimate virus. And it's painful to think where the source is from.

Anything else, James, that you want to say?

Okay, let's let's move on to this final section then to deal with the burial of Jesus. So verse 38, you have Joseph of Arimathea and then Nicodemus involved. Any particular comments or questions relating to his burial?

[Catharine:]

Yes, the secret believers, the secret disciples. With my daughter working in the Middle East for many years amongst Muslim people, I'm very familiar with this phrase, "secret disciples," those who can't come out very openly about their faith, but they are still very faith-full to Christ. And both Joseph and Nicodemus were important influential people, they didn't want to lose face but on the other hand, when this happened, they did have the courage to go to Pilate, and I mean, part of me thinks they may well have sensed Pilate's discomfort about this whole thing. That Pilate really didn't want to put this man to death. So maybe with that thought in mind, they gained courage to go and approach him as present governor and somebody that they probably wouldn't normally go to. Because they sense that he will be sympathetic to their requests. Really.

[Andrew:]

Yes. Which he was. James.

[James:]

Well, there's just some details of that are brought out like myrrh and aloes and, spices and the place where he is laid. I just wonder whether any of those details has something more more significant than at face value, but I'm not sure what they do. Just seems interesting that John notes those things in particular.

[Andrew:]

Yes, that's that's a good point. 75 pounds' worth of spices is quite a lot of spices. Yes, that's quite a heady mix really. I mean, just from from a background point of view, Jewish burials are usually very rapid because it's a hot country. And so decomposition is pretty quick. And so it gets smelly. So in a very general sense, spices are to mask the smell, but this amount of spice is a spicing to do with honour. This is a spicing to do with, "We value this person." And so, my guess is, there's an element of personal commitment or personal witness being expressed. You know, like you said, for Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to go public, to Pilate at least, and say, "Look, can we, ..." you know, they're identifying themselves, instead of Peter saying, "No, I've got nothing to do with him," these two are saying, "Yes, we're associated with him." And then when it gets to the burial, they want to honour him with an investment which would have cost some money. You know, they would have had to invest a little to communicate this and it's kind of coming out of the closet. It's kind of admitting their affiliation; and myrrh, you know, it's one of the spices that was given by the Magi at Christ's birth. That was always associated with what you do with bodies. So it's almost come full circle now.

Any other thoughts?

[Catharine:]

Yes. John doesn't have any mention of the women looking on. But the other gospels do, that they obviously knew where this tomb was, whether they were looking from a distance or just heard that. They're there the next day, well, on the Sunday.

[Andrew:]

Yes, indeed.

Of course, this is very final. I mean, we read with hindsight. We get chapter 20. But the people in the story don't know chapter 20 is going to happen. And there was a stone rolled in front of all of this. And that's the end. That's the end as far as they're concerned, there's not even the smallest glimmer of believing anything else is going to happen. So this is a profound full stop for everybody involved. You mentioned Peter has disappeared. The other guys, the other disciples have already gone. At some point the women go and the apostle John goes, and at some point, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus go, they all have to walk away. You know, we were talking about our personal response to all of this. I mean, it'd be interesting just to finish with the two of you. There is something important every time it comes round in the year to enter into the story and to feel the weight of what has happened. James, what's your response on a Good Friday to this story?

[James:]

Yes, well, I think probably one of the most convincing things I feel is when I read through the denials and I just like, yes, like I kind of see myself there, I see the ways in my life that I can be tempted to to deny Jesus or, like Pilate, maybe kind of feel affection for him but not follow that rightly, not to love him as I should. Yes, the thing that really presses on me is, Jesus is a loving King. he's come to lay down his life for his sheep. Am I going to follow him in return? Or am I going to go astray?

[Andrew:]

Yes, yes. Heavy stuff. Catherine?

[Andrew:]

Yes, what I was doing before we came online, I was on my keyboard and I was playing some of the Good Friday hymns, and, I must say, whenever I sing, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," that is the one. I mean, it's one I've known from my teenage years. And it's, yes, I sometimes find the hymn writers and some of these hymns *just* have the right words. And I do find that is very helpful.

[Andrew:]

Yes. I'm going to draw that to a close at this time. It seems not only theologically appropriate but poetic, at a time in our world where so many people are dying of a virus, so many people are dying, people that we now know, people unknown to us. Statistics that seem to just soar. And here is the One from God who dies with us and for us.

Those of us who are Christians, we know this Man. We know the One who is being written about here. It's the most peculiar thing to be able to reminisce with someone who is now alive, about their death. You know, you can't do that with anybody else. But to some extent it's a sore privilege, isn't it, to think of the Jesus that we love going through this, the Jesus who is with us now as we speak, this is what happened to Him. And we can't simply get cross about it because we need it. We, we have to own it because we're part of the crowd where we're Peter, the denying disciple, we're no better than Pilate or Caiaphas. There's something of empathy with many of the characters in this.

So yes, as we draw to a close, I just wonder if we could have just a moment of quiet and maybe I just finish with a word of prayer. Let's all be still. We've had a chance to look at the text but let's just have a moment of quiet.

And perhaps Catherine and James if there's anything you would like to pray as we finish. Do feel free to pray.

[James:]

Yes, Lord Jesus, we praise you that you went through this and you suffered for us and yes, Lord, we praise you that that you went willingly, you went knowing what you were doing. Yes, please would you fill our hearts with love for you because of that? Yes And would you assure us especially in this, this time that feels a time of suffering, a time of death, that yes, that Sunday is coming, that You are the Resurrection and the Life that yes, that you were raised to life, you will raise us to life, and yes, suffering is not the end of the story. Yes, help us to get to, more now in this period, but to look forward to the hope and the goodness, the new creation that you offer. Help us to get to do that today I pray. Amen.

[Catharine:]

Father, we think of the women mourning at the foot of the cross. We pray for the many, many people mourning today, at the loss of loved ones, and we pray that you would comfort, that you would give them your peace, at this time. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

[Andrew:]

And so Lord Jesus as we conclude this study, we thank you for John's Gospel, we thank you for these two chapters. We pray that they would continue to speak to us. We pray that we would draw closer to Jesus Christ in this. And as has already been said, that we would begin to be drawn into the next joyful phase of this story. Give us hope, in a world that is concerned and worried and anxious and afraid, give us hope. And help us to be people who can share hope, hope that will last in Jesus Holy Name. Amen.

Can I say thank you, James, and thank you, Catherine, for joining me. It's been brilliant to do some Bible study together. So God bless you and I hope you have a really good rest of the Easter season. Okay.

God bless you. I'm going to finish now. Bye bye now.

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