

What Do You See?

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, thank you everyone who's been involved in our service so far this morning. It's going to be really helpful if you have your Bibles open there at Luke 23, those verses that we just heard, read just a short while ago.

Who remembers watching Sesame Street as a child? Some of us? Yeah? Well, this morning's sermon is brought to you by one simple question, right?

In association with one simple question. And it's the question, what do you see? What do you see? So, what do you see?

Hands up for a saxophonist. Hands up for a lady's face. A few of us, great. Okay, here's the next one. What do you see? Hands up for faces.

Hands up for candlestick. Now, if you're Scottish and you look hard enough, you can actually see a thistle there. That's what I noticed when I looked at it there. Here is one more. What do you see?

[1 : 07] Hands up for old woman. Hands up for young woman. Okay, we're doing well here. Here's the last one. What do you see? Hands up for duck.

Hands up for rabbit. Right? Right? Yeah? Yeah. Yeah. Kind of a rabbit, isn't it? So, here's one more. And I wouldn't ask for a show of hands on this one. This is going to take us to the heart of the passage this morning.

What do you see? What do you see? The cross. The symbol I was reading this week that beats both McDonald's and Apple to the title of being the most recognized symbol in the world.

The symbol that, according to statistics, defines the lives of approximately 31% of the 7.3 billion people that call this planet home.

What do you see as you look at the cross? A man dying on a wooden beam. Why do Christians get so excited about a man's death?

[2 : 12] It's a question I asked myself, I remember, before I became a Christian. It's school. Remember at the time I was reading Macbeth. If you've read Macbeth, if you grew up in the Scottish education system, you most definitely read Macbeth.

What's Macbeth known as? A tragic hero. I thought to myself, is Jesus, is he just, as we see him die, this innocent man on the cross, is he just another tragic hero? Is the cross, as you look at it there to you this morning, is it utter nonsense?

Or is it something that is staggeringly significant? Friends, what I want to suggest to you this morning is that what happened on Good Friday, AD 33, is the most life transforming of events. And don't just take my word from it as a Scottish bloke up the front. Take Luke's word for it. Luke, remember? Traveled with him for what feels like a long time now.

Luke, the good doctor. An eye for a detail. A hunger for a truthful diagnosis. He set about writing this detailed account of Jesus' life. So that Theophilus, the man who right at the outset commissioned him to write this report, can have certainty about who this man really is.

[3 : 30] The question in Theophilus' mind is, is this man Jesus really worth following? Now that's a great question to ask, is it not? Regardless of who you are this morning, regardless of where you've come from, regardless of what you think about this Christianity business.

It all comes down to that question. Is Jesus really worth following? What Luke's going to say this morning is that his answer is an overwhelming yes.

And Luke's headline in these verses this morning, quite simply, is that the cross changes everything. The cross changes everything.

Now today we've reached the climax of this whole Jesus story. We've seen Jesus, the sinless son of God, God in the flesh, allow himself to be betrayed by one of his closest.

Allowed himself to be handed over to the religious mob. And tried and condemned, we saw it last week, didn't we? To death by this kangaroo court who will stop at nothing, baying for blood to see him die.

[4 : 32] And so in our verses this morning we're going to see Jesus die. And you may have noticed, as Paul read it for us there, that Luke fills this scene with tons of people.

Tons of people. All looking at Jesus on the cross. Many are following this man. Some are weeping for this man.

Others are mocking this man. Others are even participating with this man. But all of these people, as we read this account, all of them are in one way or another reacting to what they're seeing. What they are witnessing, as they try in their own minds to try and wrestle with who this man Jesus is. What is happening to him? Why is he on the cross? And the most important question of all, what on earth does it matter?

So Luke, as he takes us on that journey in the cross, he wants us to see four things. We're just going to rattle through these four things this morning, okay? So there's your binoculars, the top right of the screen.

[5 : 36] That's our question. What do we see? What do we see as the look at the cross? Luke wants us to see four things. Firstly, the path that Jesus walked. Follow with me, verses 26 to 31.

Jesus, remember at this point, he's been beaten and he's been flogged. He's forced to carry his cross. This bit of solid wood that would have weighed something like 30 or 40 pounds. It's heavy. And he's forced to carry it to this place called Golgotha. His nickname with the locals is the place of the skull. Probably because the Romans loved it as an execution site, but also probably because the place where it was, the rock, kind of looked like a skull.

The place of the skull, that's the nickname for this place. And at some point on that journey to the place of the skull, Jesus becomes too weak to carry on. And what do the Romans do?

They seize a random passing man and they throw him down in front of the cross, force him to carry Jesus' cross. Simon. Here's our first individual in this scene.

[6 : 45] Simon. Where's he from? He's from Cyrene. This man is from North Africa and he's come to Jerusalem as a Passover pilgrim.

Now you can imagine that he's probably done this journey tons of times before. But this year, he found himself thrown into a moment which he never saw coming and into a moment that he will never forget.

You know that moment when you've just come back from holiday and then the first day back in the office or the first day back when you see friends, what's the question they always ask you? How was your trip?

How was your trip? As much as Simon, he gets back to North Africa, turns from Jerusalem, meets up with his pals. What do they say? Simon, how was your trip? Simon, you go every year to Jerusalem.

Did you get a good selfie of you and the temple this year? How was it? How was your trip? And Simon says, sit down and let me tell you. What did he do?

[7 : 48] Follow it with me in the verses. He carried Jesus' cross. And what did he see? Verse 27. He saw lots of people following this man.

And what did he hear? Weeping and mourning. And he heard this man Jesus tell those who were walking with him, get this, not to cry for him, but to cry because of the state of their people.

This people, this nation, remember, who were meant to be God's holy people. The surrounding nations were meant to look in and say, wow, isn't there God's great? They're meant to be God's holy people and yet their hearts, Jesus knows, are rotten before their maker.

Jesus, in his moment of agony, is loving these people. And he's pleading with these people to seize the day and turn back to God before time runs out for them because their lives are just like our lives. They are here today and they're gone tomorrow. What a pilgrimage trip that was for Simon. Imagine him telling his friends that one. Now, here's the question as you try and get into this passage.

[9 : 03] Do you think Simon, when he got to Golgotha, do you think he dusted himself down and he wished Jesus all the best? What did they say in France? Bon chance. And he carried on with the rest of his life.

I think that's what happened. Of course it's not what happened. What a life transforming event for this man, Simon. If you want to flick to the end of Mark's gospel, he tells us the names of Simon's

two sons, Alexander and Rufus.

The reason being, Mark is doing it for his Roman audience that not only can you go and you can talk to Simon's sons, they'll tell you about what happened to their dad that day in Jerusalem, but presumably that they too became followers of Jesus, just like their dad.

See, here is a life transforming moment for Simon. Simon's declaration that the cross changes everything. Luke says, see the path that Jesus walked.

What do you see as you look at the cross? Secondly, Luke says, see the pain that Jesus suffered. Verses 42, sorry, 32 to 43.

[10:16] So Jesus arrives at Golgotha, place of the skull, and Luke, in the account, he spares us the gory details of what happened on the cross.

Presumably because his generation are all too familiar with what crucifixion means and what it entails. And what the Romans did to their victims, it wasn't pretty. The physical agony of the cross. The loss of blood. The shock to the system. The suffocation when they no longer had the energy to lift themselves up to breathe.

It wasn't sanitized, what Jesus went through here. Luke tells us, isn't he, that Jesus is led out with two other criminals. Up they go. Jesus in the middle, one criminal on the right, the other on the left. And even in this horrific moment, take a moment just to ponder the words that come from Jesus' mouth at verse 34. In response to everything that he's just gone through, with people presumably mocking him from every angle, feel the compelling words that communicate to us God's indescribable love for his creation and for the very creatures who are subjecting him to this.

[11:36] And I don't know how you react when you are wronged. I got my bill from, my phone bill this week. For the month, 15 pence over.

Honestly, my first thought was, heads at Vodafone need to roll. What happens when you get wronged? How do you feel? The sense of injustice, the sense of this is not right.

I look at this moment and I'm thinking, go on Jesus, make your words here. Father, blitz them because they know exactly what they are doing. This is how I would have reacted. But Jesus is not like me.

And Jesus is not like you. Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they are doing. Now, savor this, take this in.

That the one who said, turn the other cheek. He lets them hammer in the nails. Jesus, the man who is truly innocent in his final moments.

[12:36] He's not pleading for his own innocence. He's pleading the defence of the guilty. Friends, see the throbbing heart of God that oozes grace and love for a world that has rejected him.

John Stott, famous Anglican minister, said this as he looked at the cross. He said, the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God.

But the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. It's the heart of what's going on here on the cross. Let's keep going.

Verse 35, the soldiers, they divide up his clothes by lot. But the people watch. The soldiers mock. They offer him wine, vinegar, this cheap drink so popular with Roman soldiers.

They offer Jesus this and they do it so that the agony that he's going through can be prolonged just that little bit more. And Pilate puts this sign above his head as he hangs on the cross saying, this is the king of the Jews.

[13:44] Here he is. This is the king of the Jews. Mocking in his own kind of way. Public notice of a crucified person's crime was intended by the Romans to be a warning that if you, anyone else, so dares, as tries to do what he's done, this person's done, then this is what's going to happen to you.

And so Jesus, the one truly innocent, is officially executed as a political rebel. The rulers sneer, they gloat and they ridicule. He saved others, but he can't even save himself.

Remember, God has said that cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree. So what the religious leaders do, accusing Jesus of blasphemy all the way through this gospel, they look at Jesus on this tree and they think that this is proof that Jesus is getting his divine just deserves.

And don't miss the irony that it's precisely because Jesus will not save himself that he's able to offer salvation to others.

Jesus wasn't bearing the curse for his own wrongdoing. Jesus was bearing the curse that we deserved for our wrongdoing. Some of you may have seen Mel Gibson's film, The Passion of the Christ, that came out a number of years ago.

[15:08] This film that he put together to try and capture the final moments of Jesus' life. Gibson directed the film, but actually Gibson's only in one scene in that whole film.

And it's his hand that holds the hammer as it drives the nails into Jesus' hands. It was Gibson's way of saying that he took some responsibility for what happened at the cross.

And it's true because all of our hands are on that hammer. It was my sin and your sin that put him there. It was because of our wrongdoing and our rebellion against God that Jesus took the hit.

He goes here to deal with our sin. And with Jesus suspended on the cross, we get this little conversation at verse 39. Between Jesus and the two criminals who were crucified with him.

One of them, understandably, hurling insults at Jesus. Mocking him. Ridiculing him. You claim to be the Messiah. You can't even save yourself.

[16:18] What are you doing up here alongside us if that's who you truly are? Some Messiah you are. But for the other criminal, the grace penny. It somehow appears to have dropped.

So presumably as he's heard Jesus pray that God would forgive those who confess their sin before him. He concludes that Jesus is a man who is dying differently. Shouts to his pal, doesn't he?

Here we are taking the punishment for our crimes that we rightly deserve. And yet this man has done nothing wrong. And he pleads with Jesus. What does he say? Remember me. I pause and think about this man for a minute.

This man has no time to create a portfolio of good deeds so that he can be considered good with God. This man only has time to say to Jesus, in the words of John Newton, the famous slave trader from Bristol, I am a great sinner, but you are a great saviour.

And the response from Jesus is remarkably beautiful. Today, you will be with me. In paradise. In paradise. Do you see how this man, his eternal destiny has been changed forever?

[17:34] Whereas before he was separated from God, now he will spend eternity with God, enjoying him and worshipping him forever. Such a poignant illustration of everything that Jesus came to do.

To save wretches who had no hope of saving themselves. To bring hope to people who were facing despair. To restore broken and fractured people to the God who made them and who loves them. This is grace. Right here. Remember growing up as a child being taught that grace, being given something that I don't deserve, a really easy way to remember it, and you've probably heard this one before, is just by a simple mnemonic.

Grace, God's riches at Christ's expense. It's exactly what's going on here. God's riches at Christ's expense.

What is it? The old hymn says, Oh perfect redemption, the purchase of blood. To every believer, the promise of God, the vilest offender who truly believes. That moment from Jesus, a pardon receives.

[18:46] Luke says, See the pain that Jesus suffered. What do you see as you look at the cross? Thirdly, Luke says, See the possibility that Jesus opened.

Verse 44 to 49, Jesus hangs on the cross for something like six hours. And Luke tells us that as Jesus dies, that darkness covers the land.

This supernatural work of God that was telling the watching world that Jesus was bearing God's judgment for the sin of the world on himself. Dealing with our sin.

And declaring it to be paid for, finished. Again, I remember when I was young, there was a trend that started among my friends that some of them started wearing wristbands.

It's a trend that you see still going today. But these wristbands had the letters on them, WWJD. If you're around a certain time in the 90s, you'll probably remember that trend.

[19:46] WWJD. What would Jesus do? I think the idea behind it was a great idea. It was that every time you were faced with a situation in life, that you would look at your wrist and you would see WWJD.

And you would think to yourself, right, what would Jesus do in this situation? Well, friends, see before we WWJD. We've got a WHJD.

Stay with me. It works. Okay. Before we, what would Jesus do? We have to build it on a foundation of what has Jesus done? What has Jesus done?

He has paid for my sin. Not in part. But the whole. I am saved not because of my best efforts to try and be Jesus. I am saved by trusting that Jesus' death in my place has made me right with God.

You see, the cross is the place where we see God's perfect justice and his perfect love kiss one another. The apex of God's perfect love and perfect justice.

[20 : 57] And you see with that little detail that Luke drops in, the curtain of the temple torn in two. The 60 feet high. I'm 6'1", if that helps you do the math.

60 foot high. 30 feet wide. I've got no idea where I am this way. But 30 feet wide. Curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place.

The place that God had said that so holy is he and so unholy are his people. That only one man once a year was allowed to go in there because it was a very dwelling place of God.

But now this curtain is torn open in two. And here is God declaring to the world that through Jesus he has made a way for us to come and know him.

It reminded me of the famous picture of John Jr. Kennedy playing in the Oval Office. A place that no other person would ever be allowed except by invitation from the president.

[22 : 08] To every other human being, that place was no go. That man was no go. But to John Jr., as well as being Mr. President, he was dad.

He was God, as it were, with this curtain torn open inviting us to come and be John Jr. Come and be John Jr.

Come and know me. Come and know that I have made a way for you to be made right with me. And to enjoy life with me forever.

You see, Christ's death on the cross has flown the doors, heaven's doors wide open. The scandal of the gospel is that Jesus died for his enemies. But the gift of the gospel is God himself.

And so Luke says, oh, would you take a leaf out of this Roman centurion's book who we meet in verse 47? Do you see him?

[23 : 13] Of all people, a Roman centurion? He looks at Jesus and what does he see? Well, he praises God. And he looks and he sees a righteous man.

As if to say, that's who I'm following now. Luke says, see the possibility that Jesus opened. And fourthly, Luke says, see the place that Jesus rested. Verses 50 to 56.

Luke introduces us to Joseph from Arimathea. A member of the religious council. A devout man who's placed his hope in God.

And a man, crucially, who didn't agree with the decision to put Jesus to death. And what's going on here is that Joseph is coming out into the open as to how he views Jesus.

He goes to Pilate and he says, Jesus deserves a respectable burial. And so, verse 53, he wraps. Look at the effort he goes to. He wraps Jesus' body in a linen cloth.

[24 : 16] And he places his Jesus body in a specially crafted tomb. The one that he's probably had made for his family. What's going on here is that Joseph is nailing his colours to the mast.

At a time when it's extremely risky to be associated with Jesus. Here is Joseph declaring to the world that I follow this man. I follow him.

Friends, I wonder if some of us this morning, as we see Joseph going public, are convicted in our own lives, in our own friends, in our own families, that we need to go public.

To our friends, to our families, to our colleagues, standing tall and saying, this is the man that I follow. A great way to do that is to invite your friends to church next Sunday.

He says, looking for the flyer. I knew you'd tucked it away somewhere. Great thing to do. Why don't we make a commitment this week? Easter Sunday, we've got tons of flyers to give away. Tons of flyers to give away.

[25 : 17] Why don't we make a commitment as a church family this morning? To pray about and to ask at least one friend to come along next Sunday. And say, come and meet the man who has transformed my life.

Come and meet the man who is not dead. Come and meet the man who has conquered the grave. Come and meet the man who is able to give life. Come and meet Jesus. Why don't you come to church with me this Sunday and find out?

As we leave the scene, verse 55, Luke tells us that there are eyewitnesses to what Joseph did.

Really important to see some women, the ones who had followed Jesus, all the way from Galilee in the north, all the way to the cross.

They see the tomb. They see that Joseph really has laid Jesus' body there. Really important to see because it's these women who will come back to the same tomb on the Sunday and they will find it empty.

They got it right. They went to the right tomb. They saw it. And Luke says, see the place that Jesus rested. And so as we take in this scene, as Jesus dies, let me ask you, who do you think is in control?

[26 : 29] Luke has been showing us all the way through this account, all of this that is happening, it's all happening exactly as God said it would happen. Casting lots for Jesus' clothes, not a throwaway detail.

Jesus thirsting, not a throwaway detail. Jesus mocked and ridiculed straight out of Psalm 22. You can read it afterwards. Jesus, the righteous sufferer who that psalm was pointing to.

Jesus suspended on the cross with two criminals, literally being numbered with the transgressors, buried with a rich man in his death. Straight out of Isaiah 53 is to say, Jesus is the long-awaited suffering servant who has come to save God's people.

It's Luke's way of showing us that the cross is not an accident. It's a glorious salvation plan of God. And it's going down exactly as God said it would.

Friends, what do you see as you look at the cross? Paul would write 1 Corinthians chapter 1 that the message of the cross is foolishness.

[27 : 27] To those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved, it is the very power of God unto salvation. The cross changes everything.

See what Luke's doing is he's been doing all the way through this gospel. One man from North Africa, one criminal, one Roman centurion, one religious leader, different people, but with one confession.

The cross changes everything. Luke has shown us how it's transformed the lives of his generation. And the truth is that the cross continues to transform lives today as Jesus offers newness of life and forgiveness.

As we close, I was at a East of Scotland Gospel Partnership joint service a few weeks ago. And people from all over Edinburgh, all over the church is coming together to pray and to share and to celebrate how God is at work in this city through his people.

Hearing testimonies, stories about how people have come to faith in the last year. And just as we close, we're going to watch this short video testimony of a man called Jimmy.

[28 : 32] Scottish, okay? Jimmy. Love it. From Musselboro. And it's his story about how he came to follow Jesus. And it's his story about what he sees as he looks at the cross.

And then we'll pray to close. Why don't we watch this? Let's pray, shall we? Father God, thank you that you loved us so much.

That you sent Jesus to be our saviour. Help us to know that the cross really does change everything.

And would you help us at this time of year as we seek to share that wonderful news with everyone that you would put in our path. That they too would come to know the incredible love that is shown to us by your son, Jesus.

Father, thank you so much for this time together. Be with us this week, we ask, because we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.