

A Necessary Sacrifice

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Brilliant, thanks Amy. Folks, keep those verses open in front of you at all possible if you can. Come with me to verse 50, which I think, if you like, is the hottest verse in this passage over which we can stretch out our hands and warm our souls with the life-giving message contained therein. And there at verse 50, you'll see this man called Caiaphas and he says, he says, you do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. Now let's drill down a little bit more into what he's talking about there. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to think back to when you were a child and you started asking questions about how things came to be. Right? I remember when our kids were little one night, we had roast chicken for dinner. And as we're talking in, the kids turn to us and ask us kind of out of the blue, where did chicken come from? Now what's the first place parents in that moment do you do? You try and do a kind of matrix duck the bullet, don't you? When it comes at you. And we said to them in that moment, we tried the whole, we got it from Tesco thing. The kids are having none of it. We're in for round two. They say, where did the chicken come from? And we said, or I said rather, you know, the farmer looked after the chicken on the farm. He fed it. He sent it off to Tesco. We bought it. We took it home and we cooked it. And even I wasn't buying that one. So we're in for round three.

And they say, yeah, but where did the chicken come from? And so we start explaining to them that what was true for the carrot on the plate was true for the green bean on the plate, was true for the potato on the plate, was true for the chicken on the plate, that something had to die so that we would eat. And if we didn't eat, we wouldn't live. Right? Something had to die in order that we would live. And with that in your mind, come back to Caiaphas, who says, it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. Now, we finished last week with Jesus bringing Lazarus back from the dead. Can I just say I was like a kid on Christmas morning, hearing the responses that people were telling me about how they were so moved by what we saw last week? Jesus in all his beauty, in all his glory. Can I just say that's why we do this every single Sunday? It's not just because this is what happens when you go to church. Right? This is not some kind of religious TED talk that people give up here. No, no, no. We fundamentally believe that when we open this book, the living God speaks to us. Or more powerfully, perhaps, more pointedly, when we open this book, Jesus Christ himself preaches to us. And when he speaks, this is what we thought about last week. When he speaks, things begin to happen. And so we left last week. Our souls were strengthened by the fact that this Jesus can give us life. But remember, life in John's gospel is eternal life. Life now that lasts all the way beyond this life into forever. And the only way that Jesus can give us that life is through his death. And that's why John's put this little section right after Lazarus to help us see it. So if Lazarus, the beginning of John chapter 11, if you like, was the warm-up act for Jesus' own resurrection, which is coming at the end of the gospel, then this today is the heads up. And more than that, it's the explanation of the cross to which Jesus is about to journey to and die on. Now, this whole concept of something needs to die in order for us to have life is woven through the entire Bible story. Particularly, it is woven into Israel's DNA as a nation. In the sacrificial system that God gives them, God's showing them that in order for them to be made right with him, sacrifice must be made. Because this God, he is good. He is the three times holy God. He is our creator.

He is the God who cannot tolerate evil and sin. And let's never lose sight of who this God is. Some of us will remember that film, vintage 90s, classic Disney, Honey, I Shrank the Kids. Do you remember that? For the dad, he creates this machine and he accidentally shrinks his kids and the neighbor's kids down to the size of ants. And it's so often what we do with God. We aim the gun at him, we shrink him right down to something that we can understand, we can box and control. And quickly, this God who we conjure up in our mind, that he works like we think he should work, all of a

sudden, he becomes really small and he becomes just like us. And in all honesty, and I remember this before I became a Christian thinking that God should be happy that I bothered showing up today for his team.

And we need to do whatever we can as the people of God to help us remember that this God is simply in another league. You know, I spent some time this week with my friend Colin. Colin runs Origin Ministries here in Scotland and in South Africa. And I loved hearing this week, just some Costa over a coffee, his heart for that ministry. It's a music ministry. And he was telling me about how they made the decision recently to move to having Glasgow, their event in the cathedral and moving in Edinburgh to having their event, their symphonic praise event at St. Giles.

[6 : 50] And it cost them a pretty penny to have it at St. Giles, you understand. And I said, Colin, why did you do it? And he said this, he says, we wanted to recapture something of the majesty of God.

His splendor, his beauty. Now, yes, these are just stone brick buildings, but there's something about those places, those historic places that were built from the ground up to display and for people to revel in the glory and the glory and the majesty and the beauty of the God who is so far above us and the things of this earth and who has loved us in Christ. There's something about those buildings that helps recapture something of the glory of God. And I think he's on to something.

Is he small in your mind today? Is he big in your mind today? This God is holy. And the whole sacrificial system which he gives Israel right there is designed to ingrain that into his people, that for them to live with him, sacrifice needs to be made. And every single animal that is offered, we have to understand this, it's really simple. It's the bull for you.

It's the animal for you. And the result of that is this wonderfully refreshing word, forgiveness.

And the effect of it is that the thing becomes a pleasing aroma in the sight of the Lord. And the heart of this God is that he longs to live with a people who he's called out to be his very own. He longs to instill in the lives and the hearts of his people that desire that wants to wholeheartedly revel in who he is, that there is something incomparable about this God.

[8 : 55] But despite its scale and its intricate detail, the sacrificial system is not the main event. All of that is like Hansel and Gretel breadcrumbs that's meant to lead us as we read the Bible story all the way to Jesus. That all the building blocks, all the pieces of the puzzle would be there in their minds for them to understand Jesus and his work. And so this is where we intersect with John chapter 11.

And this is what we're going to see in this passage today. That this is all about what God has done for us. Now this has got two great ironies at the heart of it.

And I want to turn both of these Irish ironies into reasons for us to praise him. And here's the first one. Praise God that he was thinking about a better takeaway.

Right. And before you get your minds on Deliveroo, let me show you what I mean by that. Come with me to verse 45. Right. The people respond to the news about Lazarus. And John records this. Do you see?

Some people believe. Some people, other people run to the Pharisees and they tell them exactly what's happened in Bethany.

[10 : 15] What they do is they gather together the council. So this would have been the Sanhedrin. So this group of 70 or so men who oversee Jewish, not just religious life, but all of life.

And they gather together and they say, do you see it in the text? What are we going to do? What are we going to do? And here's the takeaway that they are primarily thinking about verse 48.

They say, if we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And then the Romans will come away, will come and take away both our temple and our nation.

So on the one hand, they are thinking that if this man Jesus continues to cause a stir, setting himself up as a king on Caesar's turf, then that is like a red rag to a bull when the, as far as the Romans are concerned.

If they get a whiff of another king trying to make his claim, then we're done for. But the other thing that's going on here is when they talk about the temple, it's the whole way of life.

[11 : 26] They're standing, their position, which gives them their power and their sense of comfort because they're at the top of it that Jesus is jeopardizing.

Now, it's what we instinctively do as human beings with God's truth. We suppress it, the Bible says. It's just like being on holiday. Have you ever had that feeling?

And you jump into the pool and somebody flings you a beach ball. What do you instinctively do with a beach ball? I don't know why we do this, but we do it. We lie in it and we push it under, don't we? Yeah?

Yeah? That's what the Bible means. We suppress the truth. We hold it under the water because we don't like the thought of having to deal with the truth that we might have to change in response to the truth about God and his claims on our lives.

It's words spoken all those years ago by Mark Twain. He said, and here is accent in this, it ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me. It's the parts that I do understand.

[12 : 36] But here's the thing. Jesus says it's precisely by denying ourselves and waking up to his diagnosis of us and starting to turn and walk in his way of life and according to his truth that we find life.

And whatever the cost to you today as you respond to that, here's what I want us to know. As we think about the claims that Jesus makes on our lives, as we face up to the reality of it, here's what I want us to know.

And let's get really good as a people, as a church, at rehearsing this theme in our souls. That whatever the comparison, that whatever the competition, that whatever in you and my life that we're putting up against him, Jesus is better.

And what he has done for us is better. And if you're not sold on that quite yet, see the sweet comparison here between the Pharisees and religious leaders who are using their lowly position to try and grasp at and maintain power.

Because that's what we do with power, isn't it, in our world? We crave it. We protect it, which so often means that we abuse it. And that's why, rightly, we get so upset when we hear reports about people who've abused their power.

[14 : 06] Russell Brand was in the news over the last couple of weeks, wasn't he, doing that exact thing. But Jesus, contrast this with Jesus. Jesus, on the other hand, he shows us a completely different way.

And he flips the idea of power and leadership on its head. He uses his power, and we've just seen that he's got plenty of it. He's not lacking.

There's no imposter syndrome as far as Jesus is concerned. He uses his power to serve and to love and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Is that not just the sweetest comparison of the proper use of power that you've ever seen? He is fame shy.

He is not after the limelight. No, he is after his father's will, which is to rescue his people from hell.

[15 : 08] He uses his power to serve and to save. But as far as these religious leaders are concerned, Jesus is an inconvenient truth.

Whereas God is thinking about an entirely different takeaway. And that's what Caiaphas, and you can understand him as the high, well, he's the high priest at the time, who in that role you can understand is the man who kind of speaks for God.

He says, and although he means it in a totally different way, he says it's better that he dies than the people do.

And if we take him out, the people will be safe. Do you see, he means that in a completely different way. But although he hasn't a clue what he's doing, John perceives that no truer, no prophetic words could ever have been spoken.

Jesus is going to die for the people. And it's all caught up in that word for. Because it tells us why Jesus is about to die.

[16 : 18] This is not just a classic wrong place, wrong time. This is not your classic tragic hero. No, his death is a substitutionary one.

We are off. He is on. The death that you and I deserve to die, Jesus goes in to step in as our great substitute.

He goes to bear the wrath of God as a word that just means God settled and right anger against all that is wrong. Jesus goes and like a sponge in water, he's about to soak up all the wrath of God that we deserve to have on us.

And he took it all, dear friends. There are no dregs at the bottom of that cup. Jesus drank it dry for us. All of our sins have been paid for by him.

And in so doing this, God says, there is no barrier anymore. There is no need to fear anymore.

[17 : 31] The God who made us has sent his son to die for us. He loves us and he longs that we would know life with him.

Here's a question I asked myself this week. Does forgiveness still amaze us? Or to put it in the terms of the hymn, does grace, is grace still amazing to us?

You know, I remember my friend Paul Rees, he's a pastor down at Charlotte Chapel in the West End area. He was telling me a story about an older man in his congregation who died. And he went to see the family and the family presented him as they cleaned out the room.

They presented Paul with this old man's Bible. And Paul got home and he just happened to be flicking through it in the days running up to the funeral. And it was, I think it was pretty clean until he came to Psalm 130.

And there's a big circle and a big star around Psalm 130. And if you can look this up in your own time, it is this Psalm that marvels at the forgiveness that God offers us.

[18 : 41] If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you, there is forgiveness so that we can with reverence serve you.

Let me ask you, have you taken time today to consider how much this Father loves you? You know, one of the biggest things I've tried to change and my friend Marcus, who was here a few weeks ago, was the one that inspired me to do this, is to stop thinking about my quiet time and to start thinking about my worship time.

He asked us when he was here a few weeks ago as leaders, as elders, as trustees, what's thrilling your heart right now about Jesus? Let me ask you, is it this?

That he is no reluctant saviour? That he is no arm's length Christ? That he is a fully committed lover of our souls?

Praise him that God is thinking here about a better takeaway. And real quick, praise him that God's rolling out a greater plan. This is verse 53.

[20 : 03] You see, from that day on, they plotted or they planned to take Jesus' life. He is public enemy number one. And the sooner they take him out, the better in their eyes.

They're looking for him, verse 56. But we've got to understand that playing out here is God's bigger plan to bring blessing to the nations.

And that's why I think Jesus retreats to a place that's far enough away from the action, but close enough that he can make the journey back for Passover in the not so distant future.

It's John's way of telling us that this is going to happen, not in their timing. This is going to happen according to Jesus' perfect timing. Because what he is about to do is going to be the thing that brings blessing and times of healing and refreshment to the nations and the peoples of the world. What Jesus is going to accomplish through his death on the cross is nothing less than the bringing together of the children of God. Do you see that description? And is it not just that and we say this so often and I don't think we should ever get tired of saying it.

[21 : 19] You think about how many different tribes, tongues, nations, countries are represented here today. And this is the living proof of what Jesus has done. We need to understand that the cross is the very thing that brings us together today as one people.

And the reason it's the one thing is because there is only one way to come to be right with this God. And it's the exact same thing for every single one of us today.

It's not by being better people. It's not by being born in a certain place. What brings us together today, what Jesus has done through the cross and through his resurrection, is that we would put our faith in him.

And wherever you are today, whatever is going on, wherever you've come from, that is the way that we are right with this God. Through the saviour who became sin for us.

The saviour who said yes to the better takeaway. And that's where I'd love to leave it this morning. As we think about that thought. That this is how we're right with this God.

[22 : 29] This is the only way that we're right with this God. Did you know there's an old Christian tradition when it comes to church buildings that the front doors are always painted red?

Did you know this? Have you ever noticed it in town as you walk past? At the front doors, you'll notice it now. So many traditionally are painted red. And it was to remind every single person, and just picture our doors being red this morning, every single person who came in those doors, no matter their social standing, no matter their country of birth, no matter their chosen profession, no matter their marital status, no matter their past mistakes, no matter their present failures and

worries, that we all come in the same door as we come in here every single Sunday. We all come in the same door that's marked red. Why is it marked red? It's marked red because it represents and it reminds us of Christ's shed blood for us.

And we all come in that same door this morning. All of us. Do you know what they call a Scotsman who's at the front door of his house and he's got one foot in and he's got one foot out?

Do you know what they call him? Hame-ish. Now here's the theological truth that I very much makes up for that terrible joke.

[24 : 07] Seriously, when it comes to those red doors, let me plead with you this morning. Don't be half in. Don't be one foot in and one foot out.

Come in those two doors. Don't be half in with Jesus and half in, one foot out, clinging to any merit of your own. Don't be half in with Jesus and one foot out that's stuck in the quicksand of your shame and guilt.

No, come in those two doors fully this morning. Come into God's presence. Revel in what he's done for you. Don't be him-ish.

Come in those two doors that are marked red. Here's the truth that we end on. before it's about us performing for God. It's more about his purpose for us.

God chose you before you chose him. His love for you created your love for him. Your future is defined by his purpose, not by your performance.

[25 : 11] The most noteworthy thing about you and I today is that someone has died so that we might have life.

And this is how Sam Albury, who's a guy I'm reading a lot of just now, he says this and this is where we end. And I read it this week and I thought this is incredible.

He said, the finished work of Christ on the cross is not God's way of saying to us you're free to go now, but rather you're free to come now.

He's not sending us off. He's inviting us in. Praise God that it was better for one man to die than for the nation to perish.

Let's pray and then we're going to move into a time of communion together which seems such a fitting response to what we thought about today.

[26 : 13] Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love for us. Lord, we praise you for the gospel. Thank you for the promise even in the kids talk there being reminded that you made to Abraham about how you were going to act to bring about blessing for the nations.

And thank you so much that that blessing comes to us in the person of Jesus. Thank you, Father, that he died. He took the wrath that we deserved on himself that we might live and go free and live to worship you.

And Father, I pray particularly for those of us this morning who are struggling perhaps to take this in. Father, in the spiritual battle that we find ourselves caught up in, the whisper of the devil that would say that is not true for you.

Oh, Father, may your spirit come in all his fullness and may he just dash away that life from the evil one. Thank you, Father, that Jesus died.

He took our place for our sin because he loved us that much and to accomplish your will. Father, massage that truth home to our hearts now as we sing and as we take communion together.

[27 : 31] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.