

The Most Beautiful Marriage Proposal Ever

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, thank you, Pete and Adaisy, for bringing us our readings tonight. It's lovely to be together tonight. My name's Graeme. I'm the pastor here of the church.

And let's just allow our souls tonight to be greatly strengthened as we gaze at the glory of who our self-giving King is tonight.

So whatever's going on in your life right now, whoever you've come here today, whatever struggles that you're facing, let's be in awe tonight of the King who gave it all for us.

And so as we step into John 19, as you've got the passage there, have a look at it. Know that you are looking at the most beautiful marriage proposal ever.

I've had many friends down the years who've proposed. And as far as I can tell, all of them have one thing in common. And it's this. None of them woke up the morning that they got engaged and thought to themselves, do you know what I fancy doing today?

[1 : 09] I really feel like asking a girl to marry me. And so down they went to Claire's Accessories. They bought the cheapest ring that they could find. Before they hit the high street, they stopped the first girl that they happened to see.

And they said to her, Will you marry me? It's not really how it works, is it? Or certainly I hope it's not how it works. Every single one of those men told me for months and months about this girl who they were crazy for.

And about how they knew from the moment that they first clocked her, that they wanted to marry her and win her.

And so they set about scraping together every last penny that they had to buy the perfect ring and to present it to her in the perfect way that communicated to her that I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to win you and make you mine.

And I've heard some of them tell me stories about how they did it. And I'm blushing just hearing the story, thinking to myself, I would have even said yes to something like that. John chapter 19.

[2 : 23] Welcome to the most beautiful marriage proposal ever. One that whatever is going on in your life right now, if your faith is in this Jesus, you have been so wonderfully swept up into.

And at this point, you're likely nudging your neighbor and you're saying, Have we got the right passage? And I don't blame you for maybe thinking that, because I suspect that this was the last thing that you were picturing in your mind as we read these verses in John 19 together.

Because the first few verses from verse 31 of chapter 19, this is just business as usual in Rome. Nothing out of the ordinary to see. I mean, I take it hundreds of people get crucified in the several places throughout the Roman Empire where these crucifixion stations are located.

And it just so happens that in this particular day, these three men are being crucified, and they're being crucified just outside Jerusalem. But with day drawing in, the Jews want to get the bodies killed and taken down from the cross before the clock strikes Sabbath.

[3 : 43] And I take it that's just because to have someone visibly hanging there on the Sabbath, not only was it a visible sign of God's curse, but it was just a really unpleasant and ugly thing to look at.

Didn't want that kind of thing on display, particularly during the Passover. And so the Romans, to speed up the dying process, because these things we've got to understand could last for days, they would break the legs of their victims so that they could not push themselves up anymore to get breath.

So to break their legs is effectively to suffocate them. They do it to the man on the right, and they do it to the man on the left, and then they come to the man in the middle.

And they realize when they come to the man in the middle that the guy's already dead. Now, whether it's a random act of violence to kind of flex their muscles, or as a way of maybe double

checking that the guy in the middle cross was in fact actually dead, one of the soldiers takes a spear and he pierces Jesus' side with it just to make sure.

And yes, indeed, this guy's dead. So here is another grim day at the office in Rome. You're a Roman soldier. This is another day, another dollar.

[5 : 09] Nothing to see here. And yet John the Gospel writer, remember himself, he's an eyewitness to all of this as it goes on. He seems to get really animated at this scene.

Have a look at verse 35. What does he say? The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies.

And then what he sees, then see what he says next. What does he say? Why am I telling you this, says John? So that you may also believe.

So in this scene, where the world looks at this scene, this man on the cross, where the world sees death, where it sees power and politics claiming yet another victim on another day, John, somehow, he looks at the same scene, and he doesn't see death.

He sees life. And it's not because he's just a sunny, optimist kind of guy. It's not because he's an optimist he sees it.

[6 : 15] It's because he's an evangelist that he sees it. And in particular, John sees life in this horrendous of scenes, and he sees it in three places.

Do you see them there? He sees it in Jesus' unbroken bones. He sees it in Jesus' pierced side. And he sees it in the blood and the water which flows from his pierced side.

Now, just for a little bit, let's think about those three things and how on earth John can see life in those three things. Take the unbroken bones. Two contexts to that in the Old Testament where unbroken bones are spoken of.

The first one is Passover. The Passover lamb in Exodus 12. God had told his people that when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, that they weren't allowed to break the bones.

And I take it that's a way of saying and of helping God's people understand that the lamb that you offer has got to be a perfect, flawless sacrifice. What is it commemorating?

[7 : 24] What is it helping them remember? It's that the lamb whose blood was over the door when they lived in Egypt, it was only the blood that would keep you safe from the destroyer who God would send.

In that Exodus scene, remember the Israelites are just as guilty as the Egyptians. But the one thing that stopped the firstborn son being killed was the blood of the perfect lamb that was over the door. Not to do with the quality of their faith or the intensity of their faith. It was all to do with the blood of the lamb. The second context, you get it in Psalm 34.

David there is writing and he says, God protect the righteous from our enemies. And there you get it as well. Not one of his bones will be broken.

I take it as David's way of saying the righteous person who dies, trusting God is like a perfect sacrifice. Almost symbolically signifying that the body of this person will be ready for resurrection.

[8 : 34] So the unbroken bones, John sees life in that. When the world sees random, when the world sees insignificant, footnote detail, John sees life.

He sees it in the pierced side as well. And that's where we got a reading from Pete earlier from Zechariah chapter 12. If you remember that line, John quotes from it, John chapter 19, they will look on the one who they pierced.

And that's God saying there that he's going to pour out on his rebellious people a spirit of grace.

There's going to come a time when sinners will look on the one that they pierced and their thoughts will be, did you get it in the reading?

It will be mourning. They'll look at it and think, what did we do to put him there? What have we done? What did we do? And there'll be a mixture of a spirit of conviction.

What did we do to put him there? And there'll also be a mixture of the spirit of grace. And that's what the cross is, isn't it? In one sense, it is the ultimate criticism of us.

[9 : 49] Our real sin put the real son of God on a real cross. I remember going to the cinema to watch Mel Gibson's film, The Passion of the Christ, when it came out, Donkeys years ago.

It's the only film I can ever remember being in where the film finished and not a soul moved for about 20 minutes after the film in a packed Odeon cinema in Glasgow. The weirdest thing ever. But in that film, maybe you know that Mel Gibson is in one scene in that film. It's his hand that's on the hammer that drives the nails into Jesus on the cross as he is crucified.

And it was Gibson's way of saying, of publicly saying, that he took some responsibility for what happened to Jesus on the cross that Friday. The cross is the ultimate criticism of us. And yet, it is also the ultimate liberation for us. You've got to hear this tonight. That Jesus took it all. He took it all.

[10:53] He paid it all. You know, I renewed our home insurance recently. Have you ever had this experience? They send you the renewal letter.

And I saw the cost at the top. And just growing up in this country, you're told never to pay full price for something. Or if you do pay full price, it's spelled F-O-O-L.

Right? Not paying that price. I've phoned them up and they get me a good deal. Great. So they send me the stuff in the post the next day and I look at it. And if you've ever done that, you scan down your insurance documents and right at the bottom is just two columns.

Do you know the two columns I'm talking about? Two columns. One says, what's covered? And the other one says, what's not covered? And what we've got to understand tonight is that what Jesus has done as far as our sin is concerned, there's nothing in that second box.

Nothing in that second box. Jesus has paid it all. There is nothing that's not covered. We cannot out-sin the cross.

[12:01] We cannot out-sin the cross. It is the ultimate criticism of us. It was our sin that put him there. But it is the ultimate liberation for us because nowhere else so climactically do we see the love of God and the justice of God on full display for the world to see.

It is the criticism and it's our liberation. And then we come to the blood and the water. And if you're an Old Testament Jew, you're schooled in the fact that the life is in the blood.

Without the shedding of blood, there can be no sacrifice for sin. And in John's gospel, water is associated with the Spirit.

And it speaks of cleansing and life. In Jesus' death, he releases for us both the cleansing power and the life-giving power that we need.

And John brings all of these three things together and he presents it to us and to his original readers. And he says, this is where life is found.

[13:10] In the one who gave himself for us. You know that old hymn that the church have sang down the ages? There is a fountain that's filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins.

And sinners plunge beneath that flood. They lose all their guilty stains. Friends, welcome to the most beautiful marriage proposal ever.

Here is the lengths that Jesus the bridegroom, and that's how he's been portrayed all the way up to this point in John's gospel. Here are the lengths that Jesus the bridegroom is willing to go to to win his bride.

And I love how Stuart Townend, in his modern day song, he captures it so well. He says, Oh, to see my name written in his wounds, for through his suffering I am free.

And John says to his readers, Will you see and will you live? And it's interesting, isn't it, off the back of that, two individuals come onto the scene.

[14:17] Two individuals come forward from verse 28. You get Joseph of Arimathea. Check him out, verse 28. The man who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.

So he's on the scene here. And you get Nicodemus as well, who we've met before twice in John's gospel. This man who was the top of the religious class.

This man with a CV to die for. This man who had put us to shame. This man for whom religion would be his round in mastermind.

This man who came to Jesus at night in chapter 3. And Jesus told him that you must be born again. You must be born again. It's not about what you do.

It's about what God has done. And then we meet him again in chapter 7. And he's there. He's kind of cautiously speaking up for Jesus.

[15:16] He goes for that. Is it right to try a man on lack of evidence? And yet what happens to him in that moment? He's mocked. And we're left wondering since that point, what happened to Nicodemus?

What's going on in his mind? What does he make of it all? What did both these men have in common? They're both in the circles of religious power.

They both know precisely that Jesus is the Christ. But neither want to say so publicly because they are frightened about being excluded. And yet, isn't it fascinating then that this is the moment when both Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus choose as the moment that they come out in the open about their faith in Jesus.

It's not the miracles of Jesus that are the thing that provoke them to come out into the open. It's not the teaching of Jesus that prompts them to do that. Nor is it in John's Gospel, nor is it the raising of Lazarus that prompts them to do it.

It's this moment when they see the death of Jesus, when they finally decide to nail their colours to the mast as they gaze upon the man who is nailed to a Roman cross.

[16:40] And remember that John's writing this Gospel. It was alluded to in the video, wasn't it? That he's probably an older statesman at this point. And it means he probably knows about and his world know about the rise and the impact that God made on the world through the early church.

And he's trying to explain who Jesus is for his contemporaries who are wondering, what on earth is going on out there with these Christians? But as John considers the early church, what is it that's their song?

What is the subject of their songs? What is the centre of their preaching? What is the heart of the discipleship that they're trying to get into the lives of the believers?

What's the heart of it? The heart of it is the cross. You read Revelation and you see that the Lamb who was slain is beauty enough to fill every single one of heaven's hymn books.

And it's enough to forever loosen the tongues of every single person that gathers there to worship the three-in-one God. The Lamb who was slain.

[17:54] What is the subject? What is the great object of worship? It is the Lamb who was slain. As Paul would say, it's the Son of God who loved us and who gave himself for us.

And it's interesting, on Good Friday, we close at verse 41. And do you see where we are in the narrative? As Good Friday draws to a close, we're back in a garden.

And of course, humanity's story starts in a garden. God creates Adam and he puts him in Eden. And with everything before that in creation, God declared it good. It's really striking in the Genesis creation narrative that for the first time, you see God declaring that something is not good.

What is it that's not good? It's not good that Adam is alone. And so God causes Adam to fall into this deep, strange, death-like sleep.

[19:04] That's what the Hebrew word there conveys. And God in this moment, he reaches into Adam's side. He takes a rib and presumably in a similar way to that which he did with Adam, God breathes the breath of life into her nostrils and there is woman.

This one whom Adam was designed to be one with. This one whom Adam is absolutely besotted with. This one whom Adam cannot stop singing over.

This one who is Adam's bride. And she's come from his side. And so here is the greater Adam in John chapter 19 who's put to death and from his side comes his bride.

In Adam, we see Christ's glorious intention to give life to his bride and to be one with her.

And whatever's going on in your life tonight, that is your greatest identity. That is who you are. One who has been so greatly pursued and chosen and loved by the Son.

[20:31] we find our deepest meaning as believers here. You know, just as we close, I remember hearing from a friend recently about how he proposed.

And his fiancée was in the room and in front of her he told me how he spent ages researching and saving up for what he thought was the perfect ring with the perfect backstory that was perfect for her.

And she responded and she said, you could have given me a Harry Bullring and I wouldn't have cared. And I thought, that is great. That is beautiful.

And yet, here's what we need to understand about what the Bible says about humanity. Is that we were not like that. Until the gospel is a scandal, it will not be a wonder.

The scandal of the gospel, the scandal of this proposal is that God loved us, says Scripture, even when we were his enemies.

[21:48] When we were not looking for God, when God was not on our radar, when we were not interested in turning from the darkness to the light. No, this God came looking for us.

As we were facing eternity under his judgment, this God came looking for us. When we were wallowing in and happily stuck in our sin, this God came looking for us.

And so, all glory goes to the pursuing and the holy God of love. That the Spirit opened our minds and he transformed our hearts of stone and he opened us up to receive this love seen in the atoning work of Jesus for us.

Dear friends, until the gospel is scandalous to us, it will not be marvelous to us. In the words of pastor, German pastor, Frederick Leahy, he says, as we stand and thought before that cross, our emotions are mixed.

How dreadful and yet, how wondrous is this place. John 19, welcome to the most beautiful marriage proposal ever.

[23 : 06] God, why don't we just be silent for a moment just before we move on with our service. And we don't need to rush on tonight.

Why don't we take time just to think about some of these things as we prepare our hearts to come before the Lord's table. Let's just gaze upon him tonight and rejoice in who our Savior is and then I'll pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.

So Father, thank you for who you are tonight. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. And as we look at the cross tonight, I pray, Lord, that it would come with a fresh conviction of our sin that put him there and yet with a fresh knowledge of the love of God, the pursuing love of God that went to the cross for us.

[24 : 29] Father, we thank you so much for your goodness. We thank you for your grace and we pray that you'd be with us for the rest of this evening. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen.