

## **1. New stuff in new times... irony**

In this current pandemic-derive climate, one of things that stands out is the way people are trying new stuff – within the constraints placed on us!

People are baking bread. People are trying different types of craft. People are homeschooling. People are exercising. People are using technology that they never thought they would – or, at least I am.

We are also doing Easter without gathering which is something remarkably new for the people of God. Whilst I think this is sad and a reminder of the goodness of God's design for church to be the physical gathering of his people, there is an irony – as someone said to me the other day, 'I'll never miss a church gathering or event ever again'. Our separation has created a desire for physical gathering!

Irony is one of the new things that I have been thinking about. Irony was raised for me as I read some comments on today's passage. Don Carson, the bloke I was reading, made the comment that the Gospels (the biographies of Jesus) were deeply and significantly 'ironic'.

Now, I have used that term a number of times in my life. But I thought, 'I have never really spent time looking at the Gospels as ironic. In fact, I can't remember ever looking 'irony' up in the dictionary!'

One definition I read stated, 'Irony, in its broadest sense, is a

rhetorical device, literary technique or event in which what appears, on the surface, to be the case, differs radically from what is actually the case'. Or, more simply, 'words are used to convey the opposite of what is really going on'.

In this sense, I was confronted with something new this Easter – and not just no physical gathering. I was confronted with the wonderfully exposing irony of the death of Jesus.

PRAY

## **2. Ironic...**

We are familiar with the bare bones of the events of the end of Jesus' life.

Having shared a last Passover meal with his closest friends (a meal remembering the salvation of God's people out of slavery through the substitutionary sacrifice of a perfect lamb), having shared a final time of conversation and prayer with his closest friends, Jesus walks out of Jerusalem to a garden.

He is arrested. He is submitted to a trial by the Jewish authorities. He is submitted to a trial by the Roman authorities. The two trials overlap, achieving one outcome: the sentence of death on a perfect man. For the Jews, this is because Jesus claimed to be God, although the charge they lay before the Roman authorities is that Jesus claimed to be 'king of the Jews' in opposition to Caesar. For the Romans, this achieved a level of political expediency (quietening a rabble of potentially rebellious Jews) and a level of political humiliation (eliciting from the Jews a

statement that 'we have no king but Caesar!').

At this point, we pick up the account in our reading from John 19:16. At this point, our attention is drawn to the irony of three key moments, all building on the other, all raising our awareness of what is really going on here.

### **(i) 'the king of the Jews' (vs.19-22)**

As Jesus is crucified, a sign is fixed to the cross above his head – **look at verses 19-22... READ.**

From Pilate's side, it is a non-too-subtle dig at the Jews. He is reasserting who is in real control. He is making sure they realise who is the boss.

From the Jewish side, it is an offence. After all, Jesus was not their king, in any form. He was a pretender, and they wanted the wording changed to make this clear.

But as people who have read John's biography, we know that he has been identified as such. Nathanael recognized Jesus as God's promised king way back in John 2:49. Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, the King, who had been foretold in the Old Testament, in John 12. And in John 17:2, Jesus himself knew that he had been granted authority over all things.

Pilate saw a moment of political one-upmanship. The Jewish leaders saw a moment for self-inflation. Jesus was revealed as God's chosen king, by dying on a cross.

## **(ii) 'I am thirsty' (vs.28)**

As Jesus gets close to death, he calls out – **look at verses 28-29... READ.**

From the perspective of the soldiers given the task of crucifying Jesus, this is a sure sign that they have done their job. This man is dying and they know it.

From the perspective of those watching, including his mother and close friends, Jesus is obviously out of control – he is the victim here, the object of an unjust arrest, a wrongful conviction, and an horrific death.

But as we read John's biography, we are directed to the complete and utter control of Jesus. Did you notice the words that John uses in verse 28? Jesus is so in control that he is making sure that even prophecies connected with what he will drink whilst dying are being fulfilled (for example, Psalm 69:21).

Moreover, as you step back and consider the whole crucifixion account in John, you notice how carefully structured these events are. Even the moments surrounding the clothing of Jesus (vs.24 – Ps.22:18) and the state of the bones in Jesus' legs (vs.36-37 – Ps.34:20, Zech.12:10) are governed by God's plans foretold.

The Roman soldiers saw a moment of a job well-done. Jesus' family and friends saw a moment of tragedy and mishap. Jesus himself knew that all things were happening as they should.

### (iii) 'It is finished' (vs.30)

As Jesus dies, he cries out in a loud voice – **look at verse 30...**

#### **READ.**

It is a striking moment across all four biographies of Jesus. Only John records this specific quote, but all the biographies describe Jesus as dying with a 'loud cry' (Matt.27:50; Mk 15:37; Lk 23:46). This is striking because crucifixion was death by drowning or strangulation – neither are conducive to loud cries. This is another moment when Jesus shows his complete mastery of the situation.

From the perspective of the Roman soldiers and the Jewish leaders, it is mission accomplished: this man is dead, finished.

From the perspective of Jesus' family and friends, this is a moment of utter despair: all their dreams and hopes are now finished as Jesus breathes his last.

But, as people reading the biography of Jesus from John, we must be struck by the way Jesus finishes with this word. It is a single word – 'tetelestai'. It is a word which has already been used – twice, in different forms, in verse 28. It is a word that Jesus himself has used a number of times to describe what he is doing – in John 4:34, 5:36 and 17:4. Each time, it carries the meaning and weight of 'accomplished': Jesus has come to do a job and he will continue until that job is accomplished.

For the Romans and the Jewish leaders, 'it is finished' means Jesus is finished, dead, gone, defeated. For the friends and family of Jesus, 'it is finished' means their hopes are dashed. But for

Jesus, 'it is finished' means that he has accomplished everything that was set for him.

The irony is clear, and we must not miss it. The opposite of what so many think is going on, is actually taking place. What seems to be happening is not really what is happening. But, and this is the key question this irony poses us: What has Jesus accomplished?

### **3. The culmination...**

#### **...of rejection (1:10-11; 5:16-18)**

Before we go further, the irony here is that those who think that they have triumphed have just confirmed their rejection of Jesus and God, just as God said they would. **Listen to John 1:10-11... READ...**

The prologue to John's biography of Jesus warned that such a day would come. At the moment when the enemies of Jesus think that they have won, they have just confirmed what God knew would happen.

#### **... of the plans of God (1:12-18; 17:4; Is.53:10)**

But there is more going on here than just confirming the rejection of God and his plans. In the same prologue that describes the rejection of Jesus, we are shown the plan of God – the mission that Jesus was sent to accomplish – **look at John 1:18... READ.**

The mission of Jesus is no less than the mission God gave Adam and Eve and which God gave Abraham's family: to reveal God to the world. But this is not a simple show-and-tell. The whole purpose behind this revealing of God is so that people will come

back to God and have life as God designed it. This was what was lost in the judgement of God of Adam and Eve. This was what God committed to in his promise to Abraham. This was what God's people, Abraham's family, failed to do. And this is what Jesus came to do.

Jesus is very clear about this in **John 4:34... READ.**

Jesus is very clear that he came to reveal God as he truly is – the most significant one in all the universe – **listen to John 17:4... READ.**

And Jesus is very clear that this is life as God intended – **listen to John 17:1-3... READ.**

The mission that Jesus was given was the mission to reveal God as he is to the world so that the world would know him and come to have life as God intended (REPEAT).

The problem is this: we are sinners. Humans are indelibly and irreparably, of themselves, damaged by sin. We are beset – all of us – with the attitude and action that says, 'I am God and God is not'. Our default position is that we do not want to know God, we cannot know God, and we refuse to know God – because of our sin and the judgement we are under for our sin, from God. We do not want to know God, we cannot know God, because we are his enemies, opposed to him, under his judgement for rejecting him.

It seems a forlorn proposition! Jesus came to reveal God so that we can have life. We cannot know God because we are sinners

who are under his judgement. How will this be resolved?

The resolution comes in the irony of the death of Jesus. The one rejected by humans, put to death because he came to reveal God, dies so that we can know God (REPEAT).

This has always been the purpose of Jesus' mission – listen to how one of the first witnesses to Jesus describes him, twice, in **John 1:29 and 36... READ.**

At the heart of Jesus' mission to reveal God, as he is, was the job of dealing with human sin. This mission could only be accomplished by Jesus, the perfect man, dying for all the imperfect people – by him being the perfect substitute for humans in sin. Jesus stood in for us, stood in place of us, taking the judgement for our sin upon himself.

In doing this, Jesus paid for the one thing that stops any human knowing God, and having life: Jesus paid for our rebellious sin!

How ironic! The very moment when the Romans and the Jewish authorities thought they had won, the very moment when those closest to Jesus were crushed – that very moment is the moment when Jesus accomplishes the mission he had: he died as the perfect substitution for our sin, taking the judgement for our sin. How ironic!

#### **4. How ironic!**

As people have tried new stuff during this pandemic, different parts of their lives and personalities have been stripped back,

changed, revealed. Irony performs the same role – it exposes and reveals as we realise that what we thought was happening is actually something much deeper.

As we share an Easter unlike any other we have probably experienced, let me encourage you to let the irony of the crucifixion, the irony of the gospels, work on you, exposing and revealing and posing questions. Here are three to start with:

### **(i) Who is Jesus?**

The irony here must expose our common views of Jesus – victim, good bloke, misguided swami, charlatan – and bring us to the real Jesus: the one who came to reveal God as only God could be revealed: by his Son. The one who came to reveal God by dealing with our greatest roadblock: sin. The one who accomplished the mission set before him: to bring life by bringing sinners back to God.

### **(ii) Who is God?**

The irony here must expose our common views of God – judgemental old man, distant and forgetful grandpa, inconsequential divinity, an empty space into which we can pour our views. God is none of these. God is the one who wants to be known by us, through Jesus, alone. God is the one we must know if we are to have life as it should be.

### **(iii) Who am I?**

This brings us to our last question... Who am I? This is the question that we must finish on. This current pandemic, and the fascination with trying new stuff to get by, has caused many

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people to think about who they are – people who weren't bakers, can now make a loaf of bread! But, even more importantly, let the irony of the death of Jesus strip back some more layers as you ask yourself, 'Who am I?' Am I someone who continues to not know God through Jesus, and so not have life? Do I have life, even at a time when everyday life has been turned on its head, because I know Jesus and so God?