

The Great Exchange

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Date: 03 July 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Now, one of the most risky things to do in wartime is a prisoner exchange. One side offers to send prisoners back who have been captured in war in exchange for the enemy sending their guys back home safely.

Perhaps you've seen that in films like Bridge of Spies, as the two men walk towards one another across the bridge, as they cross paths, we're on the edge of our seats, we hold our breath because it's such a tense operation.

So much risk comes with it. Now, on the one hand, you've got a pressure from families who just want their loved ones home. But on the other hand, the exchange has to be very carefully balanced.

You can't offer it someone less valuable, say an officer of a lower rank or a status than the person you want to bring home. But at the same time, you can't offer someone more valuable.

It looks desperate and shows weakness to the enemy. Negotiating that exchange can take months and years. And even then, will the agreement hold?

[1 : 2 0] Will it come off? And so when that exchange finally happens, it's cause for huge celebration, isn't it? Because of what it's cost to bring loved ones home.

And that idea of an exchange, it runs straight through the heart of this passage that we have just read from John's Gospel together. Okay, it's not exactly a prisoner exchange, but it is very nearly that.

Armed soldiers come to arrest Jesus at night. He's in the garden with his disciples. And look what Jesus says there in verse 9 to them.

He says, I told you I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go. No, Jesus gives himself to be taken captive so that his followers might go free.

That is the truth at the heart of this passage that we'll see and open up this morning. But we're going to see this is no ordinary prisoner exchange, firstly because of who Jesus is, then because of who his followers are, and then finally because of why that exchange had to take place.

[2 : 3 7] Firstly, then, in this exchange, who is Jesus? Who is Jesus? Now, this is one of the big questions about the Christian faith.

It's one of the big questions for John in this gospel that we've been looking at together. And as we've seen, it's a big question to ask in an exchange. Who is it who's being offered? How valuable are they?

Well, then, who is Jesus and how valuable is he? Well, the first clue for us is in verse 4. John writes that Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, went out and asked them, who is it you want?

Notice that he knew what they were going to do to him. Then, therefore, says John, he stepped out in front of them and he gave himself into their hands.

There's two incredible things there about Jesus, isn't it? Firstly, that Jesus knows exactly what the next few hours would hold for him.

[3 : 44] Not because he's got really good intuition and he's figured out the plan. Not because he's got really good night vision and can see who's coming for him. No, because he knew what was going to happen to him because he knew that he was in control.

He knew this because it was God's plan. We got a glimpse of that back in chapter 13 when Jesus told his followers ahead of time, very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.

Remember, he took the piece of bread. He gave it to the very one who was going to betray him and said to him, what you're going to do, do it quickly. Jesus knew he would be betrayed.

He knew he would do it. He knew how it would happen. And in fact, it's only when he gives the word that the wheels began to turn and the plan was in motion.

Jesus knows what is going to happen to him because he is in control. But the second incredible thing about that, not only that he knows what is coming, but that he willingly gives himself over into that plan.

[4 : 54] Jesus has never been the victim of this plan. He isn't surprised by his enemies. He's not taken against his will. He doesn't resist. No, he freely steps out before those who would take him captive.

So the big thing here is not simply that he knew. It's what he did with what he knew. Because the most natural thing for us to have read here, I suppose, is that Jesus, knowing what was going to happen to him, ran for his life.

Instead, what we read is the very opposite, knowing what he would suffer in the next few hours. The hatred and the humiliation, the crucifixion, the death.

He stepped out in front of this mob of soldiers and priests and leaders and gave himself up. Who does that? Who is this with that knowledge, with that will?

Well, this is someone who knows everything and is in complete control of the plan. But do his enemies know that? Well, not yet. Anyway, who is it you want, he says?

[6 : 09] Jesus of Nazareth, they reply. They have come to the garden in search of simply a man. And to us, he is famous. I think we can miss this sometimes in the Gospels.

To him, to them then, he was infamous. He was notorious. Why have they come for him at night to take him captive?

Back in chapter 11, Jesus had raised someone from the dead. And lots of people saw this and they believed he was the son of God. But it got the priests and the rulers raging.

And at that time, the high priest said, Do you not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish?

He was worried lest the whole nation of God's people go after Jesus the Christ. No, says the high priest, let him die and not the people. And so from that day on, we read, they plotted to take his life.

[7 : 11] And so to this mob, carrying literal torches and pitchforks, Jesus was nothing more than a wanted man. They have no idea who he truly is.

But we, we get a glimpse of it in verses 5 and 6. I wonder, did you not think this was strange when we read those verses a minute ago?

That Jesus seems to say simply, I'm the one you're looking for? But verse 6, you read, when Jesus said this, they drew back and fell to the ground.

Now, hang on, what? Have we actually ever read that in our Bibles before? We tend to kind of mash all the Gospels together, don't we, in our heads into one kind of mega-Gospel.

And we think we know what goes on in the garden. And does that really happen the night that Jesus is captured? Well, what does John in his Gospel want us to see in that?

[8 : 18] Remember, there's quite a crowd now in the garden. There are priests, some religious officials, some soldiers. That word detachment can refer to anything up to 200 or 600 or 1,000 soldiers.

So picture at least, okay, the number of people here today, and probably quite a bit more than that, standing there. And when Jesus says, I am he, they all fall to the ground.

I had a conversation once with a guy who said, that must just have been because Jesus said it very forcefully. I don't know about you, I don't find that very convincing.

How forcefully would I have to speak to knock you all out of your chairs? It's very improbable, isn't it? Now, the answer isn't how Jesus said it.

It's what he said. And what that tells us about who he is. So to help it read smoothly, the translators have translated Jesus' words, I am he.

[9 : 21] But what Jesus actually says is simply, I am. I am. Why is that important? Because it is the name of God himself.

When people ask, who is this God? Asked Moses. What did God say? I am who I am. Tell them, I am has sent you.

And Jesus takes that name as his own. He's done that throughout this gospel. I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world.

I am the resurrection. Jesus has told us who he is by saying repeatedly, the name of God, I am. He has claimed to be God with us.

And so why is it that hundreds of people draw back and fall to the ground when he says this one last time in this gospel? Because it is a moment of divine self-revelation.

[10 : 25] It is God drawing back the veil for a split second to show who he truly is. And what we see when he does that is Jesus of Nazareth.

When Jesus said, I am, they fell back and drew to the ground because they could not stand in the presence of the true and living God.

Jesus is proving himself here not only to be knowledgeable and powerful, but the one who is all-knowing and all-powerful, God himself. And friends, if that is not shocking enough for us to see in these pages this morning, hear this, that our God gave himself that night.

That his people might go free. Read with me again from verses 8 and 9. Jesus answered, Who is Jesus?

He is God who gave himself in exchange for his precious people. Most beautiful and glorious, most beautiful and valuable being in existence, hands himself over to his enemies, that his people might go free.

[12 : 00] Now, we thought a moment ago how if this was an ordinary prisoner exchange, well, the trade would have to be fair. So, who is worth God being given and exchanged for?

Whose life is that precious, that valuable? Well, this is our second point. Who are Jesus' followers? Who are Jesus' followers? Well, by contrast, we see they are clearly not in control.

The first thing Peter does is to cut someone's ear off. It's impulsive, isn't it? But despite his zeal to defend Jesus, we see that Peter's faithfulness at this point is just a flash in the pan.

It burns bright and hot, but only for a second, and then quickly fizzles out. Now, to understand this section, verses 12 to 27, we have to read it a bit like a courtroom drama.

It switches back and forth between two scenes that are both happening at the same time. So, you can imagine we've got camera one rolling inside the room with Jesus in his interrogation.

[13 : 13] And we've got camera two rolling outside in the courtyard with Peter. And in effect, what John's doing here is holding up Jesus and Peter for us to kind of compare and contrast.

How do they do under pressure? They're both being questioned about the same thing. So, how do they compare? Are they of equal worth and value?

So, that begins in verse 15, where we read, Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Now, that, I think, has to be a bit tongue-in-cheek on John's part, because, of course, in a sense, Peter was following Jesus physically.

He was going where Jesus went. But, in another sense, spiritually, Peter proves that, really, that is where the following ends.

In fact, he says so, because when Peter is questioned, and the searchlight turns on him, he says that he doesn't even know Jesus.

[14 : 18] Who is he to me? See that verse 17? You aren't one of this man's disciples, too, are you? She asked Peter. He replied, I am not.

Notice that contrast. Jesus, I am. Peter, I am not. It hasn't taken much, has it, to turn Peter from being Jesus' personal bodyguard into a wet piece of lettuce.

The girl on the door asked to see his ID, and he bottles it. Jesus? No. Never knew him. He switched to camera one, inside the palace with Jesus.

Meanwhile, verse 19, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. So, how will Jesus get on, then, before the highest, most powerful religious ruler in the land?

Well, he proves himself to be the polar opposite. See, his reply, I've spoken openly to the world. It's all on record, he says. I stand by what I've said.

[15 : 26] I've always taught in synagogues or the temple where all the Jews come together. I've said nothing in secret. Jesus claims he's got nothing to hide. And it's true.

We can check the record ourselves, even today. We can go back to the pool where Jesus healed a paralyzed man. And what did he say when he was challenged?

Whatever the father does, the son does also. But we could go back, couldn't we, to the time when Jesus fed the 5,000 on the hillside. And there he said, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never hunger. Whoever believes in me will never thirst. If you go back, couldn't we, to the graveside where Jesus wept by the tomb of his friend and said, I am the resurrection and the life.

And there he called the name of Lazarus and he came out. We can check the facts. It's all on record if we want to question him. Perhaps you're here today and you do have questions for Jesus.

[16 : 30] Maybe big, big questions about life and death, good and evil, about God, about us. Perhaps you would love to put him in the dark, to interrogate him.

Who are you? Who do you think you are? Jesus. Well, whoever you are this morning, if you have questions for Jesus of any kind, his words are here.

He's left it on record. The rulers resort, don't they, to threats and insults and violence. We don't have to. We can hear him for ourselves.

And perhaps you have friends or family, maybe. You have lots of questions that they love to ask you. And that's a great opportunity, isn't it, brothers and sisters, to be able to say, well, you know, I don't know, but let's find out together what Jesus said.

Would you read his words with me? Do you have a look at a gospel? That's a very humbling thing to say. It's a very humbling thing for our friends to do.

[17 : 38] Because it brings us from the territory, doesn't it, of what we think, and my word against yours, to see what he says. And people aren't always willing to do that.

It's amazing if you ask anyone about Jesus, very often someone will have an opinion about him. But they won't usually have actually taken the time to read about him, to hear actually what he said.

But we know, we can see, can't we, there's a gap there. And if we have any integrity, we want to be able to hear what Jesus said on his own terms. To ask him our questions first, before we form an opinion of him.

Jesus says, if I said something wrong, testify to what's wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why do you strike me? You know, and that is a decision we all have to come to.

Was Jesus wrong? Or did he speak the truth? If you don't know Jesus this morning, personally, yourself, surely you need to find out. And if we do know Jesus, well, surely we want to give people we know the chance to find out, don't we?

[18 : 46] So don't be afraid. Don't be afraid to open up his words. To read them for yourself. To read them with somebody that you know. Because Jesus holds up under interrogation.

He is big enough to take our questions. And he stands by what he said. He won't back down. He even suffered for the truth of what he spoke.

Not so, however, with Peter. Here, that is Jesus. Switch back now to camera two. And verse 25. Meanwhile, Simon Peter was standing there, warming himself.

Jesus is being struck. Peter is getting warm. So they asked him, you aren't one of his disciples too, are you? He denied it, saying, I am not. He gets another chance.

Didn't I see you with him in the garden? Again, Peter denied it. And at that moment, a cock began to crow. What does John want us to see?

[19 : 49] Compare and contrast. Jesus speaks the truth. Peter tells a lie. Just as strongly as Jesus stands by his people.

Well, Peter denies his Lord three times. And then the rooster crows. Because, of course, that same hour that Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, he told Peter that he would deny him.

Very truly, he says, you will disown me three times. So back to our question. Who are Jesus' followers? Unfaithful?

Fickle? Fickle? Weak? Treacherous? Promise breakers? Who does Jesus give his life for?

People who would deny him quicker than we would dare to imagine. And, friends, Jesus knows that. Peter had just finished telling Jesus, I'll lay down my life for you.

[20 : 53] Really? Says Jesus. No, in fact, I know that you will deny me to spare your own life. At the very same time, I give my life for yours. And, friends, if we don't yet see ourselves in Peter here, let's just look back at the last week or month or year.

How little it has taken for us to give in to our sin. How little it has taken to push our devotion to the margins of our lives.

How little it has taken for us to see Jesus as someone nice to have, but not necessary for life. What about opportunities that we've had to own him, identify with him, before kind of unbelieving friends or neighbors or family, perhaps?

How many times have we chosen in a moment of panic just not to say anything? How many times have we not been prepared to publicly own Jesus as our own Lord before others?

Or hoped, maybe? Hoped that nobody would ask. Now look at Peter. And who do you see staring back?

- [22 : 10] Is he not a mirror of our very selves? This is who we are, brothers and sisters, if we are Jesus' followers. If you're new to church, it's really important that you know this, that Christians are not holier than thou, or we shouldn't be.

Because the Bible tells us that Jesus gave himself and died not because we were so good, so faithful, so holy, but because we were so unfaithful.

And so unholy. He died for Peter. He died for me. He died for you. And that is the scandal of the gospel.

That exchange, it is not a fair thing. We are not the equal of Jesus. Jesus did not die for good people who deserve it. He died for the wrong people who deserve to die ourselves for our own sin and our own unfaithfulness.

Friends, that is the great exchange. And it came at the greatest cost to God and to his son. So then, the natural question is, if that is the case, and it is, why did he do it?

- [23 : 26] Why the exchange? That's the final thing John wants us to see here this morning. The purpose of the exchange. Why was he exchanged for us? Well, Jesus and John explain it at three points in this passage.

Why the exchange had to happen. First is in verse 9. This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled. I have not lost one of those you gave me.

Jesus had made a promise. This, he said, is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all he has given me, but raise them up on the last day.

And so here is Jesus keeping that promise, carrying out that charge from the Father to keep hold of his people to the very, very end. And the only way for him to keep that promise, to hold on to us as people, was for him to take our place.

Now, what place is that? Well, Jesus explains in verse 11, where he says, Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me? The cup.

- [24 : 37] Now, that sounds quite cryptic, maybe, but not for the very first Christians. It would have been obvious to them which cup Jesus is speaking about. And it is a cup that was meant to be for us.

Okay, in the Old Testament, in Psalm 75, the psalmist says that in God's hand, there is a cup filled with foaming wine. And in that psalm, it's a picture of God's anger against a world that is full of sin.

And the psalmist says, even though it's in God's hand, it's not God who drinks it, but rather, he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.

So imagine that cup. Okay, picture it filled, brimming over with God's anger against every sin that his people have committed.

Our darkest thoughts and our harsh words. Our selfish behaviors. Our wrong desires.

- [25 : 41] Our twisted feelings. Surely it would destroy us to drink from that cup. It would be like drinking deadly poison. Who could stand?

But that is what our sins deserve. To absorb the full anger of God against our sin forever. To drink that cup down to the bottom. That is the position that we are in apart from Christ, friends.

We do not have him. But who did God give that cup to? He ultimately drank from it, drained it to the bottom. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

Said Jesus. Who did God give that cup of wrath to? His one and only son. And it was Jesus who drained that cup.

Who drank the poison. Who fully absorbed God's wrath against our sins instead of us. The punishment due to us was what he took. And he chose to take it as he stood in our place under his Father's wrath.

[26 : 48] That is why that exchange had to happen. If Jesus was to keep hold of us, his people. And never let us go. We, even today, if we follow him, we deserve, do we not, for him to cast us out?

We deserve, do we not, to drink that cup. To face the full wrath of God for our sins. But so that he could keep us.

And never let us go. He fulfilled, he satisfied the wrath of God. He drained it down to the dregs. So that me and you, brothers and sisters, would never have to.

And how did he do that? Well, here's the final piece of the puzzle in verse 14. They brought Jesus to the high priest's house to be questioned. And John chooses this choice moment to remind us that Caiaphas was the one who'd advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

Jesus took our place when he died on the cross. And John simply wants us to see this morning what an incredible thing that is.

[28 : 05] Knowing who Jesus is. And knowing who we are. That he would give himself for us. Friends, Jesus was no less God when he hung on the cross.

He was no less the I am as he bled and died. And yet he still traded his life for ours. Exchanged his place in glory for our place on the cross.

So that we, whoever we are, whatever we have done or not done, might walk free in him. If the son sets you free, he says, you will be free indeed.

I came, he says, that they might have life in all its fullness. That is why he did it. He gave himself for us that we might be free from the punishment our sin deserves.

And instead have full life with God forever. Eternal life. And do our hearts not burst this morning? To consider that, burst with praise and adoration, worship and love to him who loved us.

[29 : 14] And gave himself for us. He was our faith not drawn afresh to him. As we consider him upon the cross. And that is why John shows him to us here.

That we might see him for all he is worth and worship him. In fact, that is why John wrote this book at all. At the end of his gospel, he says, these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

The son of God. And that by believing, you might have life in his name. Brothers and sisters, perhaps that is you. Today you have put your faith in him.

You have life in him. But if you have not done that. If you have not believed in him. Well, consider what he did for you. Consider that exchange that he made for people like me and you.

What a priceless life he gave. That you might walk free and be forgiven and have eternal life. It is not fair. But it is what he chose in love to do.

[30 : 19] That we might have life with God. Believe in him. And take hold of that life today. Let us pray together. God our Father.

We come in awe to you to consider what it cost you that we might live with you. Who it was you gave that you might gain us.

Father, we thank you for your son, the Lord Jesus. God bless you. We praise you, our Lord, that you came freely, willingly, and in love to give yourself for us upon the cross.

How we praise you that you drank that cup. That you satisfied the wrath of God against us. And that you did so not begrudgingly.

But because you wanted us with you in glory where you are. Our Father, we confess that we are not worthy of such love. We do not deserve the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 31] But he holds himself out to us this morning and we take hold of him in faith. We thank you that we are secure in him. That he will never let us go if we have trusted in him.

And Father, we pray for those who have not yet done that. And how we pray that you would give them a heart, even today, to take hold of him by faith. And have their sins paid for.

And life with you forever. Lord, this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.