

Jesus knew the cross was coming – and chose it because he loves us.

Hi – I'm Matt, one of the members here at Magdalen Road Church, and today I'm going to start us into a new series in the run up to Easter. We're going to be following the story leading up to Jesus' death as told by Luke, one of his earliest followers.

Perhaps you're wondering what a **tragic story** about the murder of a great, but **misunderstood, moral teacher** could possibly have to do with you – or maybe you feel so **familiar** with these chapters in Jesus' life you're finding it hard to imagine it's worth looking at them again.

Here's why you should listen today: this story, if it's true, and I believe it is, this story shows us an incredibly **courageous Jesus** who is **determined to die** – and that determination **needs some explaining**.

So let's start into the story together and see what we find. We're going to look at quite a long section of Luke's text so we won't be able to cover everything that's in here by any means. I'm going to cut it up into chunks and feed it to us bite-sized - parental training comes in handy! So can you find Luke chapter 22 with me? We're picking up the story just before Jesus' last meal – and right after Judas has agreed to betray him. We'll start reading at verse 7.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

"Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked.

He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the

owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."

They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. (Luke 22:7-13 NIV)

So it all starts pretty innocuously with preparations for a meal. Jesus sends Peter and John – his right hand men – to go get things set for the Passover meal. It's a special Jewish traditional meal. In fact, it's probably *the* key tradition in all of Judaism.

Why was it so significant? The meal was meant to be a reminder of the **origin** of the Jewish people, of the nation of Israel. It points back to the dramatic **climax** of that **confrontation** between God and Pharaoh, the night when Pharaoh was finally broken with the dreadful tenth plague, the death of the firstborn – but the Israelites were “passed over”, and hence the name. The Passover meal was designed to help Jews **remind** themselves of what God had done, how he'd brought them out of Egypt, delivering them from slavery. *If you feel like you need a reminder then try watching “the prince of Egypt” – you get a chariot race thrown in for free!*

Now remember what's **right before** this: **Judas** agreeing to betray Jesus. It might look like Jesus has no idea what Judas has been up to, that he's just cracking on with his normal religious calendar, blithely unaware of what's coming his way, but there are the first signals even here that Jesus sees around corners.

While Jesus sends Peter and John to go and get things sorted it seems he has already been making his own preparations: there's a guest room **already arranged**. Some suggest Jesus knew how **dangerous** things had become with the Jewish religious leaders, and so this scene shows us a "mission impossible"-style pre-arranged signal to keep Jesus' whereabouts **secret** that evening.

Maybe it's more amazing than that – maybe Jesus **supernaturally** knows there will just happen to be a guy carrying a water jar, and that his master will supernaturally be willing to host unexpected guests that night. I think that's more the sense we get from the tone of verse 13 "they found it just as he had told them."

Remember this is the key Jewish festival – Jerusalem is going to be **hoaching** – so a free room at the last minute is quite something to come by. But whether it's supernatural foresight or just normal human foresight, it's clear **Jesus has been looking ahead** to the meal that evening. And it doesn't stop there at all. Let's pick things up at verse 14.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God."

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

So it's not just the meal Jesus has been looking ahead to – he's seeing further ahead. "before I suffer," he says. "my body," he says as he breaks the bread. "my blood, which is poured out for you," he says.

What is Jesus looking ahead to? How far round the corner does he see? He didn't just have the evening meal in mind. No, he sees all the way to suffering, body being broken, blood being poured out. **Jesus knows what's coming. Jesus knows he's going to die.** But let's read on – there's more. Jesus continues at verse 21:

"But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!"

They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.

Jesus doesn't just know he's going to die, he knows he's going to be **betrayed**. And not betrayed by just anyone, but betrayed by one of his inner circle of twelve, one of his friends. Someone he's been through three remarkable years with. Someone he's shared endless meals with. Someone he's spent countless late nights chatting around the fire with. **One of his closest friends** will turn on him and betray him to a horrible death.

Take a moment to reflect on that. **Can you picture** being with your friends? Your close friends, people you share deep confidences with? Now imagine one of them turning on you and betraying you, selling you out, stitching you up. What do you feel? **How would Jesus feel?** He was human. He is human. He feels things too. Betrayed by one of your closest friends. He knew it was coming.

And he knew who it was.

Could he have done anything about it? Oh yes. **Imagine the scene** there in the room as they began to question each other “is it true?” “is it you?” “is it me?” All it would have taken was for **Jesus to point the finger** and say “Judas – betrayer – I know your plan. Get out!” If the others didn’t get him before he made it to the door then that would be that – Jesus could have stopped it in a moment, cut the legs from under that plan.

But he didn’t.

Jesus knew he was going to die. He knew he was going to be betrayed. But there’s more. Let’s pick things up at verse 31.

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

It's as if Jesus is **pulling the curtain back** further and further on the future. He doesn't just have a plan for dinner, or a sense that things are headed somewhere bad for him, or a suspicion Judas is up to something. No. Jesus knows what's coming in precise detail. Painfully precise detail:

He knows how many rooster crows it will be before Peter denies he ever knew Jesus.

Now it seems like **Peter has some idea** of where things are going too. See he mentions **prison** and even **death** as future possibilities where he thinks he could follow Jesus. But see how **insufficient human resolve** is, how much that bluster turns out to be worth.

It's all going to be over before the rooster crows. That's such a **short time**. It's evening now, as they eat together. The rooster will be crowing as the sun comes up the next morning. That's **just hours**. Peter's not going to last long, not long at all.

Imagine being Peter. You've given up so much to follow Jesus. You've seen such amazing things these last three years, right in front of your eyes. And now your master, your teacher, your friend tells you you're going to let him down. You protest "surely not!" but **he looks you in the eye** and gives you details with absolute certainty. Your jaw drops in disbelief. It's like the rug's been pulled from under you. The other disciples are staring at you, wondering how you could be so weak.

Not only is Jesus going to be betrayed by one of his friends, he's going to be deserted by the rest in the midst of the horror that's coming, to be **left alone to face the end**.

Let's read again from verse 35 as Jesus moves the conversation on:

Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

"Nothing," they answered.

He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment."

The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords."

"That's enough!" he replied.

What is this **fighting talk** that's showing up all of a sudden? Is Jesus really trying to turn his rag-tag band of disciples into an army overnight, ready to fight? Is he **turning his back on turning the other cheek** and embracing violence instead? That's completely missing the point of what he's saying here.

How many swords are enough? Two. Two! Against the whole Jewish leadership. Against the might of the Roman army. And two is enough?! No, Jesus isn't trying to get the disciples ready to fight.

The **key here is the quote** Jesus uses, "and he was numbered with the transgressors." Look with me at verse 37 - in the original language it's tightly connected to what goes before – essentially Jesus is saying "buy a sword for 'he was numbered with the transgressors.'" The only

reason the disciples need swords is because Jesus is going to be identified as a transgressor, a law breaker.

The whole swords thing is **symbolic** – and you can see that given how Jesus will go on to deal with the whole sword/ear mess at his arrest. The point here, the focus, is that Jesus will be “numbered with the transgressors” – he’s going to be seen and treated as a lawbreaker, a criminal. Jesus. The one who’s been healing and feeding and teaching.

Let’s recap. Jesus knew what was coming.

He knew about dinner.

He knew about his suffering and death.

He knew about his betrayal which would lead there.

He knew about his disciples deserting him during it.

He knew he’d be labelled as an enemy of all that’s right as he was killed, people shouting “crucify him”.

I have **one question** for you out of all of this: Why did he do it? **why?**

When Jesus knew exactly what was coming. When he knew who it was coming through. When he knew how it was coming. **When he could easily have changed it.**

Yes. He could easily have changed it.

Jesus was **no helpless victim** here, to be casually written off as unfortunate collateral damage in the story of the world. Like I said, he could have outed Judas, removing the betrayer, maybe even putting him to the sword – there were two at hand, right. He could have fled Jerusalem that night, escaping his enemies – he’d escaped before.

Or he could have just said “no” at anytime, anywhere all the way to the bitter end, and put a stop to the whole show. **Rolled up the skies. Turned out the sun. Ended it all with one all-powerful word.**

But he didn’t. Why?

Well, the more observant amongst you will have noticed we missed a section. And I think we can start from there to see exactly why. In fact it’s all over this narrative once you look for it. Let’s go back and read the bit we skipped. It starts at verse 24, as the disciples are trying to figure out who will betray:

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table?

But I am among you as one who serves.

You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The disciples’ search for a betrayer has quickly spun itself into a bragging contest, a fight over who is the greatest. I guess you can sort of understand how that might happen. “I could never do that – I’m

totally committed!” But Jesus turns things on their head. He is the greatest of all, but he tells them “I am among you as one who serves.” **One who serves.**

And this is the key. Why didn’t Jesus turn back? Why didn’t he turn away? Why didn’t he escape? To serve them. To serve us.

How? By dying? What kind of service is that? What help is that?

Well, Jesus didn’t just see his death coming. He saw further ahead still. He saw what his death would accomplish. **With his death he did us the ultimate service.**

Roll the tape back in your heads to the **Passover** meal we read about. What are they remembering? Remembering God’s powerful **deliverance** of the Jews from their slavery in Egypt. And the key moment in the whole thing is the tenth plague, death of the first born where the angel of death “passes over” the Israelite homes.

Did you notice **something peculiar Jesus said** about the Passover meal? Back in verse 16. Jesus says, “I will not eat it again ***until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.***” Fulfilment – of the Passover. Now that bears thinking about for a moment.

The Passover meal **points backwards**. To what’s already done. Surely it’s already fulfilled. Judgement has passed over the Israelites and they have been delivered. End of story.

Then what on earth is Jesus meaning when he says it has yet to find fulfilment?

That deliverance, great as it was, that **can’t be end of the story.**

In fact, that deliverance, great as it was, is **only a shadow** of the real story. The reality – even greater reality - is about to come. Passover is going to find its fulfilment in just a few short hours.

I don't know whether you've seen the **connection** between Passover and Jesus' death – let me walk you through it. I think it's remarkably clear one you get it.

At that first Passover, on the night of the tenth dreadful plague, Israel were given strange-sounding instructions to follow carefully. They were to take a **lamb**, kill it, and then **spread its blood** on the bits around the doors to their homes. And here's what they were told about that blood, from Exodus chapter 12, the Lord speaking:

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.

The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. Exodus 12:7-13

Do you see what's going on there? The blood of this lamb is **a sign** on account of which the plague, which God describes as **judgement, will pass over** the Israelites. Blood shed, and judgement passes over.

And what was it that Jesus said after the meal over the cup? "My blood which is poured out for you." **Blood will be shed again.** And **judgement will pass over again** too. And God's people will be **delivered again.** And this time it will be the fulfilment, the ultimate deliverance.

So when Jesus says Passover has a greater fulfilment coming, he's pointing forward to his death in our place, to how his blood will allow judgement to pass over us.

Jesus doesn't just know the betrayal, desertion, suffering and death that's down the road. **He knows the deliverance that's there too.**

And that is the key thing I want us to see today. Jesus knew what was coming and he chose to go through it. Why? He chose to go through it to rescue us.

Wind the tape forwards to the last conversation in that upper room and we'll find the same thing again. Almost Jesus' last words, there in verse 37, he quotes something from the Old Testament, "and he was numbered with the transgressors." Quite a mysterious-sounding phrase at first reading - but notice what he goes on to say: "what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment." Well, **what is written about him?** What was Jesus referring to there?

The verse he quoted is from a very famous passage in the Old Testament. He quotes just a small part of it – but it's like **pulling on that thread** in your jumper, the whole thing is connected and if you keep pulling you'll get the lot. It's like peeking through a **keyhole** and seeing the wide expanse beyond. When Jesus attaches that verse to himself, says it is written about him, he is inviting them – and us – to pull on the thread and recognise what else is written about him there too.

So what else is written? What is it that Jesus knows is reaching its fulfilment? The disciples would have known what he was quoting. They would have known what went along with it. We need to look at it too

to understand Jesus properly. Can you flick with me to where it comes from? **Isaiah 53**.

Now Isaiah is one of the greatest writing prophets of Israel, perhaps the greatest. The words we're looking at here are very old. They come from **hundreds of years before Jesus** – but Jesus says they're written **about him**. Let's read it and see what it says – we could read lots more but let's focus in near where Jesus quoted, look at verse 6:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity – that is, the guilt - of us all.

Let's flick on a touch. Look at verse 10:

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities – that is, their guilt - Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors – there it is - For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

What is it that is written about Jesus? Verse 6: “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Verse 10: “the LORD makes his life an

offering for sin.” Verse 11: “he will bear their iniquities.” Verse 12: “he bore the sin of many.”

Jesus doesn’t just know the betrayal, desertion, suffering and death that’s down the road. He knows the deliverance it will accomplish. For us. He takes it all in our place. He rescues us from it. That’s why Jesus, even though he knew what was coming, chose to go through it all.

Think of the **chef** looking through the **onion-tears** to the delicious casserole that will come. Think of the **student** looking through the toil of **exams** to the future those results will open. Think of the **pregnant woman** looking through the pain of **birth** to the joy of a child.

Jesus, we’re told, endured the cross for the joy set before him.

But it’s important we see it’s **not just through gritted teeth**, with reluctance, not just about worth it as a trade-off after some weighing up of options. No.

Look at how Jesus expresses himself – flip back to Luke 22. There in verse 15 Jesus says “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you.” And of course Jesus has in view what is to follow. The original language goes to great pains to express just how much Jesus wanted to do this. “with longing I longed to.” Jesus really wants to do this – despite knowing how terrible, how horrible, how awful it’s going to get.

Why? For you. That is why. Jesus wanted to do it for you, to rescue you. That’s the joy set before him. You, rescued from the judgement you should face, punishment which he took in your place. Strange though it might seem, Jesus loves you that much.

Messed up. Insignificant. Wrongdoing, even. But Jesus loves you. **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us,”** the Bible tells us. Not an accident. Not a misunderstanding. Not a reluctant obedience. A demonstration of God’s love. For you.

So what? What difference does this make to us?

Are you a disciple?

Well, maybe you’re like one of the disciples in our story today, cluelessly watching Jesus break bread and pour wine and just getting your stomach filled. Hearing Jesus accuse one of his insiders of being a betrayer and thinking it’s just business as usual. Watching Peter’s face fall as Jesus tells of his coming failure and looking down on him as inferior. Fighting over who’s scored the most points with Jesus so you can go tell other people what to do in his church.

But you’re totally **missing the point**, missing what Jesus is shouting at us through the drama that’s unfolding here. Jesus loves you. He loves you enough to see what’s coming and do it anyway. Jesus is about to have his body broken and his blood poured out. He walks right into it for you.

It’s like you’re on a romantic **valentine’s date**, the lights are low and your partner leans forward to share something critical from their heart with you - but you’re just busy fiddling with Facebook on your phone.

Like your child comes running up to you and jumps into your arms, eyes sparkling, wanting to tell you the amazing thing which happened to them that day – but you just want to get home and get the telly on.

Is that you? Here's my plea to you today: **feel it**. Feel how much God loves you. Let the power of this demonstration of Jesus' love for you hit you **like a sledgehammer**.

This, **this** is THE most important thing that's ever gone on in the whole world - and this changes everything. You've got to get this and have it **burning** like a fire inside you - that Jesus loves YOU, that he chose to go to the cross; for YOU.

Get a hold of that and **let everything else fade** into the background. Get that one thing into your head and your heart and have it **turn your life upside down** – like it did for these disciples once they got it.

Are you Peter

Maybe for you it's not just that you're missing the impact of these things, missing Jesus with his megaphone shouting "I love you" into your ear. Maybe you feel **more like a Peter**. Maybe you've let the side down and you're standing there in the corner, ashamed, not able to look at Jesus, eyes on the floor, feeling worthless and useless, knowing your failure.

Is that you today? Maybe it was something pretty modest. Maybe it was absolutely **massive and catastrophic**. "**Woman, I do not know him**" Peter would say, late that same night.

But do you know what? **Jesus knew it was coming** with Peter. That very evening. He tells Peter so. And then what does he do? "Well, Peter, if you're going to mess up that badly I think we're just going to have to call the whole thing off." No. Jesus knows Peter is going to fail, to fail catastrophically, and yet **still Jesus goes to the cross** for his

friend. His friend with whom he longed to eat this one last meal. His friend who will utterly fail him.

He not only goes to the cross for Peter, but he **still has work for him** to do, after he has “turned back”. Peter is going to have a key role in Jesus’ new community.

So have you completely blown it with God? Have you messed up so bad it’s hard to look him in the face? Do you doubt he could want to have anything more to do with a failure like you? Look here. Read this. Get a hold of this truth: **He knew who you were. He knew what was coming. And he did it anyway.** He did it because he loves you. Yes, even you.

He **doesn’t send Peter off** the pitch in shame to sit out the rest of the match on the bench. He has work for him to do. Critical work. In the centre of the action.

If you’ve let God down **don’t have this sideline you.** Instead, use the fact of his love for you in the face of your failure to **fuel you.** It shows you even more how much he loves you. Burn with it. Let that **extravagant grace** drive you into action – just like it does with Peter. As we read on we find him right at the front, standing up for Jesus no matter what the cost.

Are you just looking?

Maybe you’re none of these people. Maybe you’re **just a bystander**, peeking in through the window and wondering what’s going on in that room. If that’s you this morning, please please get this: **Jesus isn’t some tragically misunderstood moral teacher**, he’s **not a powerless victim** in a bigger drama. Jesus knew exactly what was coming his way.

He chose to die a horrible death. He did it in order to rescue you because he longs for you. And he invites you to come in and share that meal with him, remembering it. Please come and find me afterwards if you want to talk more – I'll be here at the front.

Jesus knew what was coming and chose the cross because he loves us. Let's pray.
