

He bowed His head (John 19)

Part 1

Speaker	J. Packer
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[00:00:01] Mr. Jack Packer takes as his subject the scripture, He bowed his head. Well, I think you will agree with me that David put us onto the line when he said, and say that the Lord is good. It's my duty to follow on tonight. I come under a difficulty today, a difficulty that has hung over me something like a shadow, because what I'm going to say, I've been tied down to it. This is one straight line as far as I can see. I come with a burden that this is the message for tonight. Personally, there were [00:01:03] things I would like to have spoken of otherwise, but the Lord has given me no freedom at all until it narrows down to a very few words. I'm afraid that some of you are going to be disappointed because you may be in a position to say, heard it before. Well, I take courage because Brother John Coote, who used to occupy this platform from time to time before he was taken home to the glory, he once said, if it's worth saying once, it's worth repeating. If it's true, keep going. Well, we'll take courage. Now I'm going to ask you to follow me through two very short scriptures and then onto what I feel I may present to you tonight [00:02:03] as that heart-reviving medicine that if you roll it under your tongue, will give you the lift that will enable you to go forward in the full sense of the love of God. So first of all, just two little verses in Luke's gospel. Luke chapter 9. Luke chapter 9, verse 57.

And it came to pass that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.

[00:03:14] Now would you turn into John's gospel. John chapter 19.

Verse 28. This is a chapter you know so well. Verse 28 of the 19th chapter of John.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar, and they filled a sponge with vinegar [00:04:06] and put it upon Hyssop and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished. And he bowed his head and gave up the spirit.

My thoughts tonight come to a very small phrase in that last verse.

And he bowed his head. May we put our eyes, by faith, upon this wonderful Savior of ours.

[00:05:03] You've heard this verse read many times. I'm sure you've considered it. We've many times considered in our meetings that wonderful cry in full vigor when our Lord with a victor's cry on his lips

said, It is finished. And those were words that might well sink down into our hearts and give us that assurance and safety that the work of redemption was completed.

Not that this was just the end, but this was the completion in the superlative sense. The work that he came to do had been raised to perfection. [00:06:03] There was no more he could do because there was nothing left to be done. And those words uttered on earth, may we say they satisfied a holy God in heaven.

A little while ago in hell, we were reminded, as we need to be reminded, that on Calvary's cross a holy God exerted himself in justice to the utmost of its terror upon the one who bore the load of sin. It wasn't a quiet demonstration. It was a full-scale, complete operation of God in action in justice against sin.

[00:07:08] And the person alone who sustained that judgment had time to say, still in his strength, It is finished. And would it be wrong if we were to say that the God who sat on his holy throne of justice had to nod his assent to this.

A work of salvation finished.

And then it says, And he bowed his head.

This leaps out of the scripture at me as one of the most tremendous statements in the scripture [00:08:01] that he bowed his head. Who is he? Well lift your eyes, look. Pilate wrote a title and said this is Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews.

How right he was.

You see, in his blundering ignorance, God insisted that the truth was there. This is Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews.

But he was more than that because John's gospel, perhaps above all others, would impress upon us that this person was none other than the only begotten son of God. And it says, And he bowed his head.

[00:09:04] He had the right to hold his head higher than anyone else.

Ah, but look what he suffered. Of emotional stress, of disappointment, of physical violence.

But this was not an act of weakness. This was an act of willfulness because he said my will is to do the will of him that sent me. Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.

And he, our blessed Lord and Redeemer, the one now exalted to the right hand of the throne of God, he bowed his head and gave up the spirit.

[00:10:13] He bowed his head.

This is always, I think you will agree, taken as an act of submission.

He submitted himself to the will of God.

And he who had the right of command, all authority, the one who friended the worlds, our Lord, it was in submission that he bowed his head.

[00:11:03] Had not this characterized him throughout his life? There was nothing haughty about him as a man. It would seem that folk called him by his ordinary name if they called him nothing worse. He was the one who is put before us in the scripture throughout all the gospels as the lowly one from God.

He spoke with authority about the dignity of God. He spoke with authority over demons and disease and death.

But he never, to use a familiar phrase, pushed himself.

[00:12:06] He was a man who was submissive.

And this scripture moves my heart so deeply that I would share with you this meditation, this wonderful comment that he, who is now in John's gospel, been established as a son of God, which he ever was, he bowed his head.

And the circumstances, you know, and the reason embraces every one of us to express the love of God in this world to you and me.

Let's proceed.

[00:13:03] It says, and he bowed his head. I'd like to turn further than thinking of this as an act of submission. Do you remember, of course you do, the Lord spoke a parable in Matthew's gospel, recorded in Matthew's gospel, chapter 22, the parable of the wedding party. I'm not going to take you through the details of that, but to remind you that amongst the folk who came in eventually, there was someone who was brought into that wedding party without a wedding garment.

And it says of him, he was speechless.

[00:14:05] He was stood there for all to see, and he had nothing to say.

He was speechless.

There was no excuse he could make. There was nothing he could plead. He just, no defense.

When our gracious Lord took our place in death, he bore our guilt.

And isn't this included in this wonderful phrase, he bowed his head in guilt.

He had nothing to say. [00:15:01] He had no mitigating circumstance because he'd taken my sin upon himself. And there was no reason why I should be defended. And the person who takes up my cause, which is hopeless, has no defense.

He bowed his head.

He bowed it with the guilt that was mine.

And the guilt of those who've unloaded their sins onto the one who became the supreme sacrifice for sin.

Don't let us minimize this in any way. This was a moment of extremity. When the extreme holiness of God was at work, [00:16:01] when the extreme horror of sin was fully exposed, and he alone who could take up such a position, he bowed his head.

What a terrible comment.

Upon our position by nature before God, had we stood ever in that position, we would have been eternally lost. And should it be that somewhere amongst us in our company tonight there's someone who's never been released from their sins, we must point you to none other than Jesus Christ and quote the scripture that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, [00:17:04] cleanses from all sin.

There is no other cleansing means.

Then this brings us, in our meditation tonight, to the fact that here was the one spoken of in Hebrews 12, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.

The shame of the cross.

You know, there have been folk who've minimized this, but let us put it into its proper place. [00:18:02] This was no beautiful ornament, this cross. This was no polished means of execution. This was a stark, naked truth of someone dying for sin.

The cross, no doubt, had been allocated to Barabbas, the prized murderer, and it became occupied by the Lord of Glory, the only Saviour.

But he despised the shame.

This was something that he turned away from, or did he? Human words are so difficult.

He accepted the shame, [00:19:01] and it was an open death of open shame with all that goes with it of stigma.

But you remember that in the 69th Psalm, when one moved by the Holy Spirit of God to record the feelings of the sufferings of the Christ, when he wrote, he said, shame hath covered my face.

This verse connects with the very short phrase we're examining tonight. He bowed his head in shame, saying, shame hath covered my face.

Oh, if I could only assess correctly [00:20:02] what it cost the Lord of Glory, who had the right to hold his head high above all else, what an act of compassion, what a selfless act it was when he took shame to the very end and said, shame hath covered my face. Don't let us get the idea that this was

an easy matter for him. Sin was abhorrent to him. He voluntarily took our sins and bore them in his own body on the tree. Blessed be his name.

May we go further.

I'd like to suggest to you that there are good scriptural grounds to believe [00:21:02] that he bowed his head in pain and in agony.

Pains of hell got hold of me.

There's only so much pain that can be physically borne until a man reacts to it.

There are some who would attempt to hide it, but here was one who knew not only shame but pain.

Let's be simple about it. Physical pain given relentlessly.

You've read of torture. There's many a man been tortured, but here was the one whose face was more marred than anyone's [00:22:01] and his form more than the sons of men. This is something of the horror of the sufferings of the Christ who loved us, and if we could only meditate upon him. Sometimes there are times when we would talk about anything but the person of the Christ, but tonight I would put him fully in focus if I could before you, not asking you to build up a mental picture of him, but to listen to the scripture, to the very words that it says, and ask yourself, what does it mean? And if it's true, which most assuredly it is, it adds up to this, if we are confronted once again with the love of Christ, [00:23:01] that passive knowledge, you'll never get to the end of this, of the one who bowed his head in pain.

Then there's another thought that I would add to this. Let us not underrate the fact that he died.

Oh yes, he died voluntarily. I laid down my life.

I have power to lay it down. I have power to take it again. And our risen saviour, whom we know by faith, is a living proof of the accuracy of his words. I lay down my life.

I have power to lay it down. I have power to take it again. [00:24:02] This was the moment when he laid down his life. The scripture says, Christ died for the ungodly.

Not for a good man. Not for somebody who tried and failed, who needed some help. It was no death in a sense of trying. It was no demonstration of goodness. It was that Christ died for the ungodly.

You and I may well be glad that as we look back on our past lives, ironed upon what we can find in ourselves presently, that we had someone who went to the extreme, [00:25:02] not in a desire to help us, but in action to help us. Action so effective, this is a word, effective, that it stands for all time and all eternity, in all circumstances, and will stand the scrutiny of the light of God. There is hope in none other, but there is hope. There's hope because Christ died for the ungodly. How is it that in Christendom today, there are so many who would rob the truth of his dying away from us?

They said a young man to me, I could get on with Christianity if you got the personalities out of it and brought it down to something, [00:26:02] just it to a code, and did away with the personal Christ. There

would be no such thing as Christianity. Why has there been a dynamic powerful good wherever the gospel has been preached? What tamed the cannibal? What turned the idolater from his ways? It wasn't the trader. It wasn't the schoolmaster. It was a preaching of the gospel of the death of Jesus Christ who died for the ungodly. And here in this little verse, it says, and hey, you know who he was. He bowed his head in death.

When the enemy felt that this was his supreme moment, [00:27:02] he made the biggest mistake in his calculations because as ever, God was supremely in charge.

In due time, not too soon, but thank God, not too late, Christ died for the ungodly.

It would seem to me that if there is any measure of the passing of time, be it centuries, millennia, or eternities, I don't know what the expression is, that this fact will always stand in its clear-cut precision and will never be eroded that in due time, Christ died.

[00:28:01] And this little verse says, and hey, he bowed his head.

I tell you, he bowed his head in death that you might live.

What an anomaly. This book of John starts so triumphantly in the first chapter by saying in him, life was.

It always was.

There was never a moment but what there was life in this eternal word of God.

But here, as a man, when we see him taking up our place in death, he submitted.

He died.

He bowed his head in submission, [00:29:03] in guilt, in shame, in pain, in death.

Now you will recall that I read to you two little verses from the ninth chapter of Luke. There was a man who came and he was so moved by what he saw in Jesus Christ that he decided this was the man to follow. He saw that he had to move quickly, definitely, and continually. And he said, Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go. I wonder if you've ever had a feeling like that spring into your heart. Well, God grant that it's fully founded and that you mean it, but listen to the cost. This gracious Lord said, count the cost. The foxes, [00:30:02] they've got their dens. The birds of the air, well, they have nests. But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

I understand that this bowing of the head, how do we find the words that describe it? Incline or declining of the head.

An act that was fully consciously done by the Lord when he said it's finished, he bowed his head and gave up the spirit. This is exactly the same as laying down the head in rest.

He said, the Son of Man hath not where to is it incline or decline or just to bow, lay down the head.

[00:31:03] May we not consider this point because it seems to spread out into what we read later in the scripture of the man, Christ Jesus, that Paul writes about. He was the one who was that man of whom it is said this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever sat down at the right hand of God. He bowed his head in rest.

His work was done.

That's why he said, well the foxes every night or is it day time, I don't know, they go to sleep. And the birds, they have the cover of their nest [00:32:02] but there's no rest for the Son of Man. His work wasn't done. He was engaged in this great work of salvation and not until this moment indicated by the little phrase that we've read and he, he bowed his head because he'd already said it's finished.

What a load must have passed off him at that moment when he died that we might be forgiven. When all the suffering, all the pain, all the shame and all that had marked his uncheered life here in this world [00:33:02] when he bowed his head in rest.

And he's the one who now having risen from the dead has ascended to the highest point of authority. We sometimes forget this. We may sing of him as the right hand of the throne of God on a Sunday and go out on a Monday morning utterly dejected feeling that we've got the whole of the burden to ourselves.

But isn't this correlated? Shouldn't we be comforted and enthused by the fact that the one who died for us in such weakness, pain, guilt and shame who took our place has been raised to the highest place of life and authority.

[00:34:04] Is it not true that God's love has moved out in such a way that we could turn you to promises which satisfy any inquiring soul that what God has done for Jesus Christ he'll do for every believer raise him and put him in his place before almighty God that place of joy and privilege in the Father's house forever.

There is no doubt there is no possibility of doubt that the person who comes to the Lord Jesus Christ and kneels at his feet as a guilty sinner is going to be blessed [00:35:01] for all eternity.

Someone in my office sort of pushed me as they passed me on a corridor and said hello, are you winning? Well if they'd known how I felt about my job at that moment they wouldn't have asked the question are you winning? I turned around and said I'm on the winning side.

I don't know where it came from but I went back to them and said look I am a believer I'm on the winning side Are you on the winning side? Are you on the winning side? Have you got your have you sided up with the Lord Jesus Christ in such a practical way as this that come what may his word is paramount.

Now this is going to lift our spirits as we roll a verse [00:36:02] like this under our tongue It will make our hearts pulse afresh because if you have lost your way in this world there's somebody who knows exactly where you are and someone who has the power to help and the remedy and is in himself the great restorer.

David knew of the Lord as a shepherd and said he restoreth my soul. Do you remember in Mark's

gospel there was a man in the meeting room there, they called it a synagogue it's exactly the same word if you chase it through the language as a meeting room. Somebody there who had a withered hand when the Lord said stretch it forth and this man I'm sure stretched it towards the Lord [00:37:01] Jesus Christ in perfect obedience it says it was restored he's our great restorer. And my dear Christian friend don't just leave that on the gospel counter it's got a meaning to you and me that if you find as someone said there's so many of the Lord's people dead and withered if you've got a withered hand find yourself ineffective and losing your grip you stretch forth that hand to him and it will be restored like the other he's the great restorer he restores the soul he can restore the hand into action he can restore the heart into circulation again in such a way that you can have a new pulsing life [00:38:01] in you and go forward here in this world but there's something else that rests upon me tonight because I want to turn your eyes away from me I want to turn them to the Lord Jesus Christ and just for a moment as we close to say this act of bowing the head he bowed his head is I believe I repeat that phrase I believe a supreme act as a man of worship you can think of many scriptures that speak of the Lord Jesus Christ in connection with the burnt offering the worship offering it's really too big a subject to open up just now but if you ever want to see an act [00:39:01] of absolute and complete worship I think it's written in this little clause and he bowed his head what I failed to give to God at every point in my life he has done it the wonderful one who died for sins and in dying he showed the perfection of the person that he really was this was an act of worship to God when he died on Calvary's cross when he bowed his head he offered himself without spot to God [00:40:01] and our joy and our personal response and the advantages that we may gain are because of this wonderful person in I must confess a very incomplete way I tried to put across some of the thoughts that linger as I read this little phrase and he bowed his head so effectively so complete in its action that if you look at it still further I am sure you will find there is much more in this phrase than I have been [00:41:01] able to develop tonight but if that is the objective side of it may we steal a moment to say what is this going to do to me reaping the benefits that come through Christ's dying for the ungodly surely you and I find ourselves in a position of privilege and privilege always brings responsibility then haven't we to listen to verses like this submit yourselves to God says James, submit yourselves if I look at my lord I find his submission was absolute in life and in death [00:42:01] it was absolute this is something I need to learn not my way but thy way not what I want to do and this knocks my ambition doesn't it it accounts for some who could have gone high in the world being pushed out at the side ranks as unskilled labour because they submitted to God's pattern in their lives but they are richer for it richer far because they are on the winning side and when the final analysis is taken you will find that these people are rich indeed the lord spoke of not labouring for the meat that perisheth labour not [00:43:01] for the meat that perisheth there is that which endures and as young men and young women we must be careful that we don't burn up the future because of today the future is secure in Jesus Christ and Paul always looked for that day this one this one who bowed his head has lifted it now and the day will come when in absolute autocracy he will rule in this world in righteousness and in equity that's when the glory of the lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the bed of the sea if we could only get this into our daily practice and live like men and women [00:44:01] who have got a living connection with such a person though we don't deserve it it's going to give us a submissive appearance in this world because our lord himself even Christ pleased not himself there's a chapter you know in the bible I read it a few days ago and said you know I've got to admit that as I read these verses I feel so ignorant about them that if somebody had quoted them to me I would have said good gracious I don't recollect them and that's a little chapter that I've never heard anybody speak about the fifth chapter of the acts it's there you read it where all the apostles were put in prison they were all released they were all scourged as I read it [00:45:01] and in the last verse they were counted it joy that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for their master he suffered shame for you and me he restored what he hadn't taken away it was our account he was settling and some of us can't stand the

shame and the derision when someone turns round as well they may and looks you up and down and says oh I suppose you really are a kind of religious man and you feel your ackles go up don't you in indignation but there were those counted it a joy to suffer shame you may look through these points I'm not going to labour [00:46:01] because I've gone as far as I can to point out what may be seen in this little phrase that he bowed his head there's all the glory of it attached to him and there's a significant lesson in many steps that if we look at it again we may find we'll lift the practice of our Christian conduct in this world and not make us walk aggressively in this world but in independence upon our lord in the knowledge that by and by we shall be with him we shall see him we shall be like him and with him forever the guarantee [00:47:01] is so secure and so complete that it ought to be the medicine that we've spoken of this afternoon the medicine that when we roll it under our tongue and think what God has put right into our mouths will send through us every one of us a reviving sense of spiritual well-being that we are God's people in this world and he's got his eyes on us even when we haven't got our eyes on him but may God help us to draw the lessons that we've been trying to look at tonight for his name's sake