

Holy Week 2019

*And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying,
“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Matthew 27:46 ESV)*

But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” (Matthew 28:5–7 ESV)

My God, My God Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Good Friday

April 21st, 2019

Matthew 27:1-61

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church. I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles to Matthew 27:1; that's on page 833 in your pew Bibles. This is the story of the crucifixion of our Lord. We enter the story AFTER Judas' betrayal and AFTER Peter has denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of the High Priest. The leaders of Israel have mocked him and abused him and rejected him – and his disciples who just recently pledged their everlasting fealty have abandoned him and now he is being handed over to Pontius Pilate of Rome. I'll begin reading the story at verse 1 and we'll read all the way through to verse 61. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. 2 And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

3 Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, 4 saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” 5 And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. 6 But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.” 7 So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. 8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.”

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the

Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." 12 But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" 14 But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. 16 And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. 19 Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22 Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" 23 And he said, "Why, What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25 And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. 27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. 28 And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. 32 As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. 36 Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way. 45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 When the centurion and those who were with

him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

55 There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Matthew 27:1–61 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

That’s a long passage but I want to zoom in, as it were upon the absolute centre – the absolute NADIR in this story; verses 45 and 46, let me read them to you again:

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:45–46 ESV)

I think it is fair to say that if you understand these verses then you understand the Gospel. This is the deep water – this is the Holy Centre - and so I want to slow down and make sure we understand what we are seeing here.

The text says that for 3 hours – from noon to 3 pm according to our way of telling time - a supernatural darkness covered the land of Israel.

Now it doesn’t matter what caused that darkness. Could have been some kind of astronomical phenomenon, could have been a dust cloud, could have been an angel standing in front of the sun – I don’t know and it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter how it happened – it matters what it means. Darkness in the Bible is a symbol of judgment – you don’t have to read too far into the Old Testament to figure that out. But WHO IS BEING JUDGED HERE? That’s what we need to understand. D.A. Carson is helpful here. He talks about some of the Old Testament prophecies that predicted this event and then he says:

“The judgment is therefore a judgment on the land and its people. But it is also a judgment on Jesus; for out of this darkness comes his cry of dereliction (v.46).”¹

Are you hearing that?

For three hours Jesus was under the judgment and censure of Almighty God.

This is the heart of the heart of the Gospel. You have to press into this moment to understand the riches and the blessing and the beauty of the Christian story. You have to HEAR CHRIST’S CRY against the backdrop of 3 hours of supernatural darkness sent by God.

What does that mean?

Theologian Joel Beeke says here:

“The Son of God is alone on the cross for three final hours, enduring what defies our imagination. Experiencing the full brunt of His Father’s wrath, Jesus cannot stay silent. He cries out: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?””²

Listen to what he just said:

Jesus is alone.

Jesus is experiencing the full brunt of God’s wrath.

Jesus cries out: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Jesus is in the dark. Jesus is alone. And Jesus is experiencing the wrath of God.

Do you understand what that means? It means that Jesus was in hell. One writer puts it this way:

“As Jesus took the sins of the world on His shoulders, becoming sin for us, he experienced the true torment of hell – alienation from God the Father.”³

¹ D.A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 13 Through 28* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 578.

² Joel Beeke, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/christ-forsaken/>

³ Trevin Wax, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/forsaken/>

So that's what is going on – in the dark, from noon to 3 on Good Friday.

Jesus is experiencing the essence and agony of hell.

You see hell is not just the ABSENSE OF GOD'S loving presence it is the FULLNESS of his wrath against sin. That's why when Jesus described hell in his earthly ministry he said things like:

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:42 ESV)

Jesus went to hell for 3 hours.

Have you ever thought of that?

You know all those books about people who have been to hell and who come back to tell about it? They are all nonsense. They are all garbage. It's just a way to make money off of gullible people who really ought to know better. Only 1 person has ever gone to hell and come back to tell about it and that is Jesus Christ.

Jesus went to hell for 3 hours – that's what the Bible is telling us. For 3 hours he was AWAY from God, in the DARK, UNDER JUDGMENT – that is what the Bible is saying and today I am asking the question: WHY?

Why?

Now to be clear – I am not trying to understand things that the Bible does not explain. Theologians wisely warn us AWAY from that sort of thing. So to carry on the Carson quote, right after he drops that bomb on us about Jesus being UNDER the JUDGMENT of Almighty God he goes on to caution us, saying:

“If we ask in what ontological sense the Father and the Son are here divided, the answer must be that we do not know because we are not told.”⁴

The Bible does not supply that information – so I am not going to go looking for it this morning. I am not approaching this text this morning looking for theological hairs to split. I am approaching this text as a penitent and as a worshipper and I am inviting you now to join me. I am looking at the cross today – I am looking at Jesus on the cross today – and I am asking my Lord and Master: My God, My God, why have you forsaken HIM?

My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Him?

I know what happened – I know what the Bible says happened – but I am asking the question WHY. Why God did you forsake Jesus on the cross? Why did he have to suffer the way he did? Why did he have to go through that? And as I search the text of sacred Scripture this is the answer that I am driven to.

God turned away from Jesus on the cross that day because on the cross Jesus was bearing MY SIN.

1. Because he bears my sin

That’s what the Bible says.

Sin separates us from God – right? If the Old Testament is clear about anything it is crystal clear about that. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, do you remember what happened? They got kicked out! The garden was where human beings walked in the very presence of God. It was a place of family and friendship and fellowship between God and human beings. Well of course that was destroyed and disrupted by the entrance of rebellion and sin. So they had to leave. They couldn’t be there anymore as sinners.

And they couldn’t simply find their way back – the text is very clear about that. The Bible says:

⁴ D.A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 13 Through 28* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 579.

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24 ESV)

Well that's very clear isn't it?

God does not DWELL with sin.

The Bible says that God cannot even LOOK AT SIN. Habakkuk 1:13 says that God is of:

purser eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness (Habakkuk 1:13 NKJV)

That is why the SONG IS RIGHT to say that on the cross "the Father turned his face away" – he absolutely did! He turned his face away because he CANNOT behold evil. He cannot LOOK UPON WICKEDNESS. And for those 3 hours on the cross Jesus was SOAKED and STAINED and SATURATED by the sins of the world.

That's what the Bible says.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

For 3 hours the sins of the world were being poured out – as from a basin – upon the head of Jesus Christ and in those three hours – when he was BATHING in the filth and wickedness of human rebellion – the Father turned his face away.

Jesus CALLED OUT TO GOD IN PRAYER AND HEARD ABSOLUTELY NOTHING IN RESPONSE.

Do you know that verse 46 of Matthew 27 is the ONLY time in the Bible where Jesus addressed God and did not call him Father?

He was still God – but in that moment – the relationship was somehow – mysteriously changed. It was different! It was as if Jesus was US! It was as if he was ESTRANGED! It was as if he was OUTSIDE! OUT OF THE GARDEN! Out of the family and out of the fellowship that we were

made for and that he had enjoyed UNBROKEN, his whole life, until now. Until those three hours on the cross.

Charles Spurgeon says here:

“Jesus, suffering as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God.”⁵

That, my friends, is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Christian Gospel. On that cross, for 3 hours, in the dark, God treated Jesus as if he were us, so that for all eternity, in the light, if we confess our sins and cling to Christ in faith, God can treat us as if we were Jesus.

That’s the Gospel right there – thanks be to God!

We could end there, but the text bids us say just a little more.

God turned away from Jesus on the cross that day because he is love – he LOVES you and me. That’s who he is.

2. Because he loves me so

I think that needs to be said afresh in our current age. Of course it always needs to be said. After talking as we have just done about how Jesus experienced the wrath of God against sin on the cross we may be tempted to imagine that God is a hateful God or that he was angry with Jesus on the cross or that the cross was one big cosmic temper tantrum – you do hear those sorts of things from time to time. People sometimes talk about the Gospel as if it is some kind of “Good Cop, Bad Cop” sort of story, but that isn’t what the Bible says.

The Bible says that the cross is a demonstration of the love of God from start to finish.

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10 ESV)

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *Commentary On Matthew: The Gospel Of The Kingdom* (Edinburgh: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2013), 429.

The word “propitiation” means simply a sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God and that restores a proper relationship.

That’s what the cross is. It is God removing the barrier that we built between us and restoring the relationship we ruined.

The cross is about love.

There was never a moment when the cross was not about love.

At no point during those 3 hours did God stop loving the Son.

That needs to be said and careful theologians are always eager to say it. John Calvin for example makes that clear, speaking about Jesus’ cry on the cross he says:

“We do not, however, insinuate that God was ever hostile to him or angry with him. How could he be angry with the beloved Son, with whom his soul was well pleased? ... But this we say, that he bore the weight of the divine anger, that, smitten and afflicted, he experienced all the signs of an angry and avenging God.”⁶

So God LOVED the Son on the cross even while the Son bore the full weight of God’s anger against sin – that’s a fine distinction but a necessary one.

God LOVED Jesus on the cross and he loved US. Paul says:

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 ESV)

The cross SAYS – more than that – the cross SHOWS that God loves us. He is not content with the present state of affairs. He is not content with us having left the garden. He WANTS to walk with us again in the cool of the day.

He LOVES US.

And so Jesus DIED FOR US – so as to pay the JUST PENALTY for our sins and to OPEN

⁶ John Calvin *Institutes Of The Christian Religion* Translated by Henry Beveridge (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 332.

WIDE THE GATES OF HEAVEN so that finally – after all this time, we can go home.

That's the third thing I want you to see. Jesus bore the wrath of God against sin on the cross – so that we can go home.

3. Because it's time to go home

You can see that in the text. Look at verses 50-52:

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. 51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised (Matthew 27:50–52 ESV)

The message there is hard to miss isn't it?

The Bible is saying that the death of Jesus on the cross OPENED THE WAY FOR US TO GO HOME. Not even DEATH can stop us now! The cross is the way through the valley of the shadow of death and back up to God and to HOME.

That's where we were meant to be.

We were never meant to be AWAY. We were never meant to be OUTSIDE. We were never meant to be IN THE DARK.

But Jesus went into the dark so that we can go home – that's the Gospel!

And that's how the story of the Bible ends. Revelation 22 – the last chapter of the Bible – contains these marvelous words:

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Revelation 22:14–17 ESV)

My dear friends; heaven is waiting for you. Your loved ones who died in faith are waiting for you. Jesus – the Son of David and Bright Morning Star is waiting for you.

Come!

The gate is open.

The way is clear.

The barrier has been removed – you can come!

You can come back to the waters of the garden through the shed blood of Jesus on the cross.

Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.