Cries of the Cross

Good Friday Worship
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That was pretty bad. Let's try that again. Good evening. It is a good evening. It is Good Friday and it is my privilege to open God's word for us tonight. You know, Good Friday strikes some, perhaps, as an odd term, to call an event of such brutality, of such ugliness as the cross, but when we understand what was going on and the cries of love that Jesus uttered from the cross, we can only call it good. We can only call it good by the grace of God.

So in keeping with our theme this night of walking through the final week of Jesus' life, tonight now, as we look into God's word more deeply, we're going to look at his final hours upon the cross and the 7 cries that he uttered from the cross as he bore the wrath of God for us. So as we come to God's word now, I invite you to pray with me, that the Spirit would cause us to see the goodness of what Jesus has done for us.

Pray with me.

Heavenly Father, Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit, as we come again to your word, we ask that you would lift our eyes, that we would be able to see with the eyes of faith. Lord Jesus, as we have heard some of the events of the final days of your passion week, Lord, we are humbled. We stand in wonder and awe and amazement and now as we look at the events of the cross and the cries that you uttered there, would you, by your Spirit, open the eyes of faith within. Cause us to see the goodness of amidst the evil and the ugliness and the brutality of what was exactly going on at the cross of Christ. For your glory's sake, Lord Jesus, we ask it. Amen.

You know, it seems that no religious symbol is able to stir such white-hot emotion as the cross of Christ. Over 2,000 years since Jesus' crucifixion, it seems that humanity has responded to the cries of Jesus on the cross and the event of the cross with many cries of their own. Often, there are cries of anger. You may have seen the terrible and horrible videos coming from ISIS of the beheading of our brothers and sisters, angry at the cross of Christ and those who would follow him. Or just yesterday, at the terrible events in Kenya as brothers and sisters by scores and scores were gunned down simply because they bore allegiance to the cross of Christ. Yeah, the cross is certainly able to stir and create such white-hot anger but, do you know what? Often even in the midst of that pain, even in the midst of tremendous suffering, if you listen carefully, there are also cries of

adoration, of worship, of thankfulness, even in the midst of such events. Adoration not for a symbol, not for something we put on our clothes and we wear around our necks and we put in the back of our cars, no, not for a symbol but for the reality of what was accomplished at the cross of Christ. But often, isn't it true that we as disciples here, removed far from, honestly, such threats of violence, often our cries about the cross, our cries of adoration are rather, they are kind of muted. They are kind of muffled. We come to Easter week and we go, "Oh great, it's Easter week again," and there's not much joy and there's not much passion.

Perhaps our cries are muffled by everything from our own sin and the burden of that, to cold hearts, to simply life's brokenness. But perhaps our cries are most muted because we have forgotten the Savior's cries of love that he uttered while on the cross and just what they mean. You see, Good Friday is good because it invites us to listen carefully again to Jesus' cries from the cross so that our own cries about the cross in whatever state we come, whatever sadness you bring, whatever hardness, whatever struggles, in whatever state we come as we listen to these cries, our own hearts would again be filled with joy, with adoration, with humility.

So let's listen to these cries again spread across all 4 of the Gospels. The first cry that Jesus uttered on the cross was a cry of pardon. We find in Luke 23 and Mark 15. Let me read them for you. From Luke 23,

> 32 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with
> him. 33 And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there
> they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.
> 34 And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they
> do."

And then Mark adds,

> 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 25
> And it was the third hour when they crucified him.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This is a cry that reveals Jesus' heart. He cries out, "Father." He speaks of his eternal relationship of love, of delight, of intimacy. God is one and yet within there are 3 and they have known a community of joy, of love, of unbroken and unbridled fellowship and intimacy. You know, I think of the best moments of loving my 2 boys where I've had my heart fullest and my delight and desire for them the greatest and that would be nothing but the darkness of a winter's forest in comparison to the joy that Jesus and the Father shared. And now, Jesus utters this cry of intimacy during the greatest injustice in human history. The one innocent man. There has never been another.

Jesus fully God and fully man, without sin, without any guilt whatsoever, without anything but love and righteousness is now being murdered. This is a cry that reveals both intimacy and injustice asking for the forgiveness and that's what makes Jesus' prayer

so absolutely puzzling here. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great pastor and theologian and martyr and one of my heroes in the faith put it this way, he said, "Now we stand as sinners at the foot of his cross and now a puzzle, difficult to understand is solved. Jesus Christ, the innocent one, prays as God's vengeance on the godless is fulfilled. The one who bore the vengeance, he alone was allowed to ask for the forgiveness of the godless." You see, Jesus was praying effectively here. He was praying powerfully here for his own death would be effective in bringing mercy to those whom God intended it for. This is not some derelict cry, some hopeless words uttered by a dying man, this is a declaration. You see, what this cry from the cross means for us is that we have a Savior who prays for his people and is effective in praying for us and accomplishing our forgiveness.

Very often as a pastor, I've had people approach me and they have asked me to pray for them and I seek that out and it's a great privilege but, honestly, my prayers are no more heard or no more accessible to God than any of yours. There is nothing to it. How different from the prayers of Jesus, the great High Priest. Mine is but a tiny plea, his is a powerful declaration. When Jesus prays, he prays for you with power. When Jesus utters words of pardon, those are words of pardon for you.

This is Jesus' cry of pardon from the cross and following that cry of pardon comes a cry of peace that we find recorded in Matthew 27 and Luke 23. Again, just listen as I read from the Scriptures for you. From Matthew 27,

> 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."

Then from Luke 23, he adds,

> 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

What a remarkable, remarkable criminal that is what my mind is immediately drawn to. What a remarkable criminal. Perhaps he had heard of Jesus. Perhaps his reputation had preceded him but this is the first time that he met our Lord and he, himself, is now undergoing a horrific death upon the cross. He began reviling Jesus like the others and yet now he comes and pleads for mercy? What changed him? Perhaps it was seeing the taunts that were hurled against the Savior, the mocking, the degradation that we can't even begin to describe in polite company, and seeing Jesus' response, seeing Jesus' love, seeing Jesus', if you will, peace even in the midst of the suffering of the cross. Whatever the reason, whatever prompted him, the Spirit awakened him and he takes his first chance and, we might add, his last chance and humbly believes in the Savior, "Remember me, Jesus."

I wonder if a murderer were to ask to join your family, how would you respond? Open arms? Open door? That's who this man was. We talk of him as the thief but, really, the robber, the term "robber" is much broader than that. This was a man who earned his place on the cross. This was a man that had spilled blood and taken lives and I wonder if a murderer were to approach you and to ask you, "Can I enter your family?" how would you respond? Jesus says, "Today," not some time in the future after you've endured some suffering and punishment and some half-life, "Today you will be with me in paradise." I love how Charles Spurgeon, the great Prince of Preachers put it, he said, "The man who was our Lord's last companion on earth was his first companion at the gates of Paradise."

Do you know what this cry means for us? This is a cry that can lift our spirits. William Cowper was a famous pastor and hymn writer. We sing some of his hymns even today but you may not be aware, he struggled greatly with guilt. He struggled greatly with dark, deep, prolonged depression and William Cowper testifies that very often his doubts and his fears would be lifted as he thought of this thief, robber, on the cross. He's the one that wrote one of my favorite hymns, "There is a fountain filled with blood," and in that hymn you hear this line,

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day,
And there may I though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away."

This is a cry that urges you, that pleads with you to rejoice because there is more grace in God's heart than there is sin in your past. There is more grace in God's heart for you than there is struggle and sin in your present. And there is more grace in God's heart than there will be sin in your future. I want you to think right now of the sins you work hard to forget, those things that perhaps the enemy raises his accusations against you. You can't possibly think that God would look at you and be pleased. Remember what you have done, I want you to call into mind: because of Christ's cry of peace, do you realize that you would not be more loved by God if you had never done them? Jesus has accomplished your peace. There is nothing that you can add to it. There is nothing that can take from it.

This is Jesus' cry of peace from the cross and it's followed by a cry of compassion that John records for us in John 19. Starting in verse 25 we find,

> 25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" 27 Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Think about this for one second. This is the pinnacle of human history. This is the high point. Love and justice in a mysterious way are meeting now in what is transacting at the cross upon Christ. Glory and grace are being held forth and in the midst of this agony, in the midst of this high point of human history, Jesus shows compassion on his mother. Do you realize you have a Savior whose compassion for you never ceases? Jesus is never distracted. Jesus never has too much going on to pay attention to you right now. Jesus never forgets where you are and what you are in the midst of. Jesus' compassion and love never grows cold and it never, ever, ever fails and I realize this is a Presbyterian Church, but it's okay to say, "Amen." That's the compassion of the Savior. Upon the cross, amidst the agony, amidst the high point, Jesus remembers his mother and he remembers us as well.

This cry of compassion, though, is quickly followed by a cry of anguish. Matthew 27 records this, starting in verse 45,

> 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."

A deeply symbolic darkness settles now over the cross and over Jerusalem. The Father brings the darkness to declare by that symbol that his infinite wrath upon humanity's rebellion and that's what our rebellion deserves, from the least sin to which you consider the greatest, an infinite wrath and darkness. This darkness pictures how it was now cascading down upon the soul of Jesus Christ. Imagine, if you will, an eternity of love, a brightness of intimacy, of fellowship, suddenly ruptured with an infinite, indescribable wrath where we do not even have words to be able to comprehend what is transacting now somehow in the mystery of the Trinity between the Son and the Father. No wonder the darkness fell. Jesus, as he bears the wrath of God in time and space, in history, undergoing something infinite, Jesus utters a cry of distress but not distrust for as he calls out, "My God, my God," Jesus here is bearing an anguish far greater than the physical suffering. Perhaps you've read descriptions of what Jesus underwent and they are truly horrific and it was nothing, absolutely, indescribably nothing compared to the anguish Jesus is willingly, willingly going through for you at that moment on the cross. Yet even in that anguish, the Father turning his face away, Jesus never loses his trust of the Father.

This is the cry of anguish and it's followed quickly by a cry of suffering that Matthew and John record for us. From John 19, we read this,

> 28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.

Matthew 27 adds,

> 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

You see, this thirst that Jesus spoke of, he was most certainly physically thirsty from the cross but that is not the cry that is being uttered here. This is not merely a thirst of crucifixion but the abiding thirst to do God's will. Psalm 69:21 says, "for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink." Jesus enduring the infinite wrath of God, yet has a heart that remains eager to do the will of God. So he cries out in fulfillment of Scripture and a hyssop branch is dipped in sour wine and brought to him. That branch had a long bushy end and a long reedy tail, if you will, that would allow them to reach up and bring the wine to Jesus and it had a long history in the sacrificial system as well. David writes of its use in Psalm 51 in his great confession, verse 7, "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." You see, that branch would be dipped in the blood of the sacrifice and then it would be sprinkled upon the altar and once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest and the high priest alone would enter into the symbolic presence of God, bringing a hyssop branch with blood and spread it, throw it against the Ark of the Covenant. How fitting that such a branch should now be used at the final sacrifice of the one true Passover lamb.

You see, what does this cry of suffering mean? It means this: that Jesus suffered parched lips; Jesus suffered and longed to fulfill the Father's will even at the cross that you and I might be able to freely drink from the well of salvation. Jesus underwent thirst. Jesus remained in abiding thirst to do the will of the Father so that one day you will no longer suffer. Revelation 7:16 says this, "Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." As the great hymn says,

"Death and the curse were in our cup,
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee;
But Thou has drained the last dark drop,
It's empty now for me."

Jesus suffered that one day you and I might not. This is the cry of suffering, this cry of love that he utters from the cross and it's followed by a cry of completion. From John 19:30,

30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."

This is a single word in Greek, one that I swear to you echoes now and will for all eternity across human history. Again, Spurgeon in his eloquent way puts it this way, "This one word would need all the other words that were ever spoken or ever could be spoken to explain it. It is altogether immeasurable. It is high, I cannot attain to it. It is deep, I cannot fathom it." "It" refers to the entire scope of your salvation. When Jesus says, "It is finished," he doesn't just mean your ticket to heaven, he means everything. Every good thing that you could ever receive from the hand of God accomplished by what Jesus did at the cross. Every moment of weakness where you need grace, it is finished. Every prayer that you utter longing for fulfillment, it is finished. Every wound, every need, every burden that you need help from the Lord from, it is finished. And Jesus says it is indeed finished. There is nothing more to do. The law of God we are required to keep, Jesus has kept it. The justice that we are due for our rebellion against our Creator, Jesus has paid it. The wrath of God, the personal righteous anger of God against a creature like me that would think in my pride and arrogance that I know better than Almighty God how to run the universe, that deserves such wrath, no more. The anger of God that I earned, Jesus bore. It is finished.

Do you know what this means? Imagine the most elaborate ball, the most intimate party, whatever affair you would love to be invited to but you've got to have a ticket and the problem is, not only do you not have enough money, you don't even have the right currency. You don't even have the right exchange. You have no way to access that event. You have no way to enter that event. Jesus has paid it in full. I want you to think of all of your sins as being written in a great ledger, everything you are aware of and, by the way, the other 95% that you're not aware of, written into some giant ledger and at the cross, as Jesus utters this, God writes across the top of that ledger, "Paid in full." That is what it means. This is what Jesus has done. Your sexual sin, paid in full. Your anger and your bitterness, paid in full. Your greed, paid in full. Your heartlessness. Your lack of compassion. Your lack of gentleness. Those words you wish you could pull back the moment you utter them. Paid in full. Your selfishness. Your pride. Your arrogance that wounds others, that perhaps has driven others away from you. Paid in full.

This is what Jesus' cry is about, "It is done. There is nothing more for you to do." To be a Christian is not to say, "I am trying to be a good person," to be a Christian is to say, "I cannot even pay the entrance fee. I don't even have the right currency but it is paid in full through the blood shed and the wrath of God borne by Jesus on the cross." Oh please, tonight, forget trying to somehow please God by your sincerity, your intentions, your works. Forget that. That's like trying to put the finishing touches on the Mona Lisa, you will do nothing but degrade it. Jesus utters a cry that says, "Everything necessary has been done for you. It is paid in full."

And following that cry of completion comes a cry of triumph. Luke, John and Matthew all record it. From Luke 23,

> 46 Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands
> I commit my spirit!"

John adds,

> 30 and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Matthew then records what happened afterwards,

> 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!"

You see, this is not a cry of the end, this is a cry of triumph. Death couldn't take its Master, Jesus is the Master of death. He couldn't take him. Jesus' work was finished so now he submits to death. Now he submits to the death that we deserve in judgment. Jesus had paid it all. Death doesn't take him, Jesus gives himself to death, submitting himself and trusting himself to the cross, to the Father. This is why this is a victory shout. This is why Jesus, perhaps, raises his voice. This is a cry of victory. Jesus has won. Death is defeated. This is a cry of triumph. This is why Paul could later write from 1 Corinthians 15:54 and following, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

When Jesus gave himself up to death, he made Easter Sunday inevitable. Easter Sunday is the inevitable vindication of Jesus' triumph. Think about it: death is part of the punishment for sin but if Jesus really has paid it all, if Jesus has borne everything necessary for God's people, all who would take refuge in him to be restored fully, then death cannot contain him. Death has no power over him. He must rise. As surely as he died, he must rise.

This is a cry that precedes and looks forward to Easter. Hear the hope here, friends. Hear the triumph of love in the cross. This vindication of Jesus, his being raised from the dead at Easter, declaring that yes, indeed, everything necessary for you, you in your struggle, to be loved. Not just accepted but loved by God has been done. Has been done. Hear the hope. Hear the hope that commands a response. This is not just an event in history, it most certainly happened but this is an event in history that calls for a response and not just a hearing. You know, perhaps you have been invited here by someone and perhaps for the first time some of this is making sense. Jesus doesn't just want you to know about him, Jesus wants you to repent and to come and to entrust your entire life and destiny to him. Your only hope is in abandoning yourself. Oh please don't trust Jesus to forgive

your sins and then try and be a good person. Trust that you need to give up not just trying to not do bad, you need to give up your hope in being good and when you do, it is finished for you. You are accepted in the Beloved.

And for all of us who have put our hope and our trust in Christ, then this is an invitation to hear these cries in faith. These cries of the cross. Cries with power, power to silence our anger and bring us to adoration. Cries to shatter, perhaps, the hardness of our hearts as we see afresh the mercy and the love of God in Christ. The cries with power to awaken a thirst within our soul and then satisfy it fully in the joy of what Christ has accomplished on Good Friday. And cries of power to lift our fears forever with the declaration, "It is finished."

Tonight, I urge you, please hear by faith Jesus' cries from the cross. Do not let another Good Friday and the pattern of Easter week simply roll over you. Ask God to awaken you to the joy, to the wonder, to the beauty and to the power of what Jesus and his love has declared is true for you because of what he has accomplished at the cross.

Let's pray in celebration.

Almighty God, heavenly Father, King Jesus, what love pictured in these cries. What power. Lord, we need the Spirit of God to awaken our dead souls. Oh, we are so easily distracted. Cries that should be full of adoration, songs that should be sung at the top of our feeble voices are muffled by many things. Oh tonight, Lord Jesus, as we think on these 7 cries from the cross, as we understand by faith what they mean for us, awaken our souls. Cause us to see the dawn of grace, forgiveness and love that you accomplished for us on Good Friday. In your mighty and matchless name we pray. Amen.