

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mt. 27:45-46; John 19:28-29; “Words of Suffering from the Cross”

Intro. Last Sunday I began a brief series of messages on the seven sayings of Christ from the cross. His first saying was, “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Next, He said to the thief who had confessed his sins and expressed faith in Him, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” We will save the third saying of Christ from the cross for Mother’s Day. Today we will examine the fourth and fifth sayings of Christ from the cross. Both deal with His suffering.

When was the last time you reflected on the suffering of Christ on the cross? In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus knew how much He would suffer beginning that very night. He knew it would be so great, and so intense, that He prayed, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” What He was to face was worse than what our brave soldiers faced on D-Day. Imagine how they felt the night before they were to come ashore facing intense fire from the German Army. Many were shot even before they reached shore. They did it for love of country, and a sense of duty. Jesus faced the suffering of the cross, not only in obedience to His Heavenly Father, but also out of love for us. Surely the greatness of His suffering is an indication of the greatness of His love for us.

So let’s look at these two sayings of Christ from the cross, and may we get a glimpse of the great suffering and love of Christ for us. Let’s look into Matthew’s account, and see first of all:

## I. JESUS SUFFERED SPIRITUALLY

At this point in the crucifixion story Jesus has already suffered three hours on the cross. He had experienced great physical suffering. Large nails were driven into His hands & feet. No doubt He had suffered emotionally as He was mocked and abused by various groups. Now were going to see how He suffered spiritually. We see two indications of this in Matthew’s account of the crucifixion. First:

A. He Suffered in Darkness – At noon a miracle took place. In Mt. 27:45 we read, “Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.” Luke 23:45 says that “the sun was darkened.” This great darkness lasted for three hours. It was a miracle indeed, for an eclipse of the sun would only last a few minutes.<sup>1</sup> Besides, it could not have been an eclipse of the sun, for the Passover was celebrated at the time of the full moon, when the moon is opposite to the sun. There are two main questions I want to answer regarding the darkness that Jesus & others experienced at the cross. First:

1. What Was the Significance of the Darkness? Some say that nature could no longer cast its light on the Creator’s suffering. Perhaps God caused the darkness to shield human eyes from gazing on the Lord during the last three hours of most intense suffering. But I believe

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<sup>1</sup> This darkness was noticed by one at least of the pagan writers. Phlegon, a Roman astronomer, speaking of the fourteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, which is supposed to be that in which our Savior died, says, that “the greatest eclipse of the sun that was ever known happened then, for the day was so turned into night that the stars appeared.” [quoted in Barnes].

that the darkness was a representation of the judgment of God, for darkness is a picture of judgment. Jesus described hell as “outer darkness.” One of the judgments upon Egypt was three days of darkness (Ex. 10:21-23).

The Lord withdrew Himself from the eyes of men behind the black curtain of darkness, as if He were the High Priest behind the thick veil of the temple, making atonement. According to the prophecy of Isaiah 53, the Lord was at this very moment laying on Him “the iniquity of us all” (v.6). That same prophecy says, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin...” (v.10). That may have been what the apostle Paul meant when he stated that Jesus was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Furthermore, Gal. 3:13 says that Christ had “become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).” Thus, He fully bore the curse of sin on our behalf, & suffered in darkness, bearing the judgment of the curse.

Now because Jesus offered Himself up as a sin offering, He received upon Himself the wrath of God upon sin. In those hours of darkness He suffered intense agony, indescribable woe, and terrible isolation. I believe that in some sense Jesus endured the agony of hell during those 3 hours on the cross.

2. What Was the Effect of the Darkness? Surely the mockery of the people was forced into a sudden silence, as many of them attempted to make their way back to Jerusalem in the darkness. Many no doubt were struck with fear. Some began to question their actions toward Jesus, as their consciences began to bother them. Surely the darkness had a great effect on those who were still at the cross, knowing what was going on.

Have you ever reached the point in your life that you have seen & felt the darkness of your own sin? Perhaps you have done something you thought you would never do. Perhaps you have repeated the same sin, though you were determined not to do so. Jesus not only suffered in darkness to pay for our sin, but also to show us the true darkness of sin. He showed what our sins deserve. Yet when a person tells a lie, he may say, “It was just a little white lie.” When a person commits adultery, he may call it “love.” We are constantly either justifying ourselves, or downplaying the seriousness of our sin. But if our sin was insignificant, why would Jesus suffer so much when He bore our sin? The truth is the cross of Christ demonstrates the awful horror and ugliness of the sin that plagues every person. Oh, let each of us repent of our sin, and seek the cleansing & forgiveness that Christ offers.

Not only did Christ suffer the darkness of God’s judgment, but we also see in our text that:

B. He Suffered Being Forsaken by God – This leads us to the fourth saying of Christ from the cross. The agony suffered by our Lord during these three hours was such that He finally uttered the words of v.46, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”<sup>2</sup> He probably spoke those words while it was still dark. Luther famously exclaimed as he meditated upon this Scripture, “God forsaken of God! Who can understand it?” Well let’s make an attempt to understand why Jesus uttered those words. I have been able to come up with six reasons. First of all, He did so:

1. To Fulfill Prophecy - This is a quotation from Psa. 22:1, a Psalm predicting the crucifixion. He not only fulfilled the words of prophecy, but the conditions that led to them.

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<sup>2</sup> This is the only one of the seven sayings of Christ on the Cross given by Mark and Matthew. The other six occur in Luke and John.

2. Because God Had Not Come to His Aid - The context of Psa. 22 helps to explain part of what Jesus meant. The Psalmist went on to say in the rest of v.1, "Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?" Then in v.2 he says, "I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear..." So it is evident that he was forsaken in the sense that the Heavenly Father did not rescue Him from the cross, nor from the intense suffering that He endured during the three hours of darkness. Yet His God and Father would not have abandoned Him to His tormentors if it had not been necessary. But it was necessary, in order that He might fully undergo the punishment due to His people's sins.

3. Because God Had Yet to Vindicate Him - Jesus was forsaken in the sense that, unlike His baptism, He heard no voice of affirmation and affection from heaven. Instead, it appeared that the Heavenly Father was silent concerning His Son.

4. Because Christ Bore Our Sin - Surely He was also in a sense forsaken of the Father as He endured bearing our sin, and suffered its penalty. He tasted the ultimate horror of a lost soul: to be abandoned by God.

5. Because Christ Was Giving a Cry for Help - We see this in the context of Psalm 22. As Jesus suffered in the darkness, His humanity must have been overwhelmed as He bore the wrath of God. Up to this point, the Father still had not delivered Him. Yet twice He affirmed that the Heavenly Father was still His God. His faith never wavered.

There will be times when you will feel like you have been forsaken of God. But in the midst of the darkness of your difficulty, reaffirm your faith in God. Keep calling on His name, and in due time He will intervene on your behalf, as He did with Jesus.

6. Because Christ Was Affirming His Innocence - Another truth that flows from this statement is the affirmation of our Lord's innocence. How could He question the Father for forsaking Him if He was guilty of wrong? Yet the Heavenly Father did not permit the cry of His Son to remain without a response. He uttered it symbolically, by dispelling the darkness, and restoring to the sun its full midday splendor just before He died.

Why was Christ willing to suffer so? He was forsaken, that you would never be forsaken by God. Though we may be abandoned by the world's favor, or the friendship of men, we who believe in Christ should never say that we have been forsaken by God.

Next, as we move over to John's Gospel, we see another aspect of the suffering of Jesus. In John 19:28 we will see that:

## II. JESUS SUFFERED THIRST

That Scripture says, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!'" Why did Jesus speak those words? Jesus would have been thirsty long before the 6<sup>th</sup> hour on the cross. Furthermore, out of all the pains that He endured upon the cross, He never mentions one except thirst. I want to suggest 3 main reasons why He said, "I thirst." First of all:

A. Of course one answer was that He was indeed thirsty. Thirst is one of the severest agonies of crucifixion. He had lost much liquid in the form of blood. A dreadful fever raged due to inflammation from numerous wounds. As a result, He suffered intense thirst, especially after being on the cross for six hours, including three hours of suffering the wrath of God. There is scarcely a greater torment than that of an insatiable thirst. Few of us have experienced such thirst. I can imagine that His thirst was indescribable.

Does it not remind us of the story of the rich man & Lazarus? The rich man had trusted in his riches, not God, and when he died, he went to hell, where he burned with thirst, and longed even for a few drops of water (Luke 16:19-24). So here we see that Jesus experienced one of the judgments of hell in our placed, when He suffered on the cross.

B. Another reason He expressed His thirst was to identify with our humanity. God does not thirst but Christ the man did. He had previously experienced the human condition. Like us He became weary in body (John 4:6); He “hungered” (Matt. 4:2); He needed sleep (Mark 4:38). He experienced human emotion when He “wept” (John 11:35) and rejoiced (Luke 10:31). Surely He was our brother, a man dying for His fellow man. He was enduring real physical suffering, for He had a real human body.

C. To Fulfill Prophecy. You see, by His thirst He had already fulfilled the prophecy of Psa. 22, which is a prophecy of the crucifixion written some 1,000 years before it happened. In v.15 of that Psalm it says, “My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.” Psa. 69 is another Messianic Psalm. V.3 says, “I am weary with my crying; My throat is dry....” That Psalm not only predicted the Lord’s thirst, but also the reproaches He bore while on the cross.<sup>3</sup>

There were twenty-eight prophecies fulfilled while He was hanging on the cross. And John says in v.28, “knowing that all things were now accomplished.” In spite of His intense suffering His mind was perfectly clear and His memory entirely unimpaired. He reviewed in a moment the entire scope of Messianic prophecies. He remembered there was one prophetic scripture yet to fulfill. So He said “I thirst,” “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” He singles out this one form of suffering because there was a prophecy concerning it. In Psalm 69, vv.20-21 we read, “Reproach has broken my heart, And I am full of heaviness.... They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” So when He at long last said, “I thirst,” He was asking that His thirst be relieved. He was giving utterance of His distress so as to provide occasion for the fulfillment.

Now notice in v.29 the response of the bystanders, probably the soldiers. “Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.”<sup>4</sup> They offered him the cheap vinegar wine the soldiers drank. As a man Christ had the power to say, “I thirst,” but as God He had the power to ensure that the bystanders would fulfill prophecy by giving Him vinegar wine to drink. Surely His words and demeanor, as well as the three hours of darkness, drew such kindness from them. They may have acted out of compassion. Or perhaps it was reverence, for shortly thereafter the Centurion would say, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54). Then v.30 says that He received it.<sup>5</sup>

Conclusion: Who is so blind as not to perceive that this just man is none other than the promised Messiah? We have seen some of the prophecies that he fulfilled even while he hung on the cross.

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<sup>3</sup> V.4 says, “My eyes fail while I wait for my God. Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head....” Then v.9 says, “Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.”

<sup>4</sup> In Matthew’s account he says “one of them” that stood by did this. Then he adds, “The rest said, ‘Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.’” (27:49).

<sup>5</sup> The act recorded here must be carefully distinguished from that mentioned in Matthew 27:34. The first drink of vinegar and gall, commonly given to criminals to deaden their pains, the Lord refused; the drink of vinegar or sour wine, He here accepted—in obedience to His Father’s will [Pink].

He fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 53. He fulfilled the prophecies of Psalm 22 and Psalm 69, as well as many others. Surely he is the promised Messiah, the Savior God promised to send. Have you believed in him? If not, let me show you other reasons why you should.

We have seen that Jesus experience the darkness of God's wrath that you may never have to experience the outer darkness of hell. We have seen that Jesus experienced thirst that you may never have to experience the agonizing thirst of hell. Even now He longs to give you the water of life. He wants to quench the thirst of your soul. Just confess your need, and He will surely meet it. Jesus said in John 4:14, "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Oh, what love Christ must have had for us? In fact, He Himself said in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." How will you respond to such love? The hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* closes with the words, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." Christ gave His all for you. Will you give your life to Jesus? Will you follow Him? The starting place is to confess Him as Savior, and follow Him in baptism.

Sources: Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (accessed through *Online Bible*); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Fred. W. Krummacher, *The Suffering Savior* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 485; Warren W. Wiersbe, *"Be" Series: New Testament Volumes 1 & 2: Book* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).