

THE GREATEST BATTLE EVER FOUGHT
Sermon for Good Friday, 2020
Matthew 27:45-50

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 27:45-50: ⁴⁵ **At noon darkness came over the whole land and lasted until three in the afternoon.** ⁴⁶ **About three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

⁴⁷ **When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "This man is calling Elijah."**

⁴⁸ **Immediately one of them ran, took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick and gave it to Him to drink.** ⁴⁹ **The others said, "Let Him alone! Let us see if Elijah is coming to save Him!"**

⁵⁰ **Jesus cried out once again with a loud voice and gave up His spirit.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

On the night of Jesus' birth, the sky above Bethlehem was lit up by the heavenly host who appeared to the shepherds, but on the day of His death, the sky was darkened. It was so dark that there was no sunlight at all, nor moon or stars, just darkness. Everything came to a stop. The angels' hymn, "*Glory to God in the highest!*" was replaced by the cry, "*Crucify Him!*" No Wise Men came on Good Friday to worship the King of the Jews. Only Pilate's notice that was posted over His head and the plea of the penitent criminal who died beside Him proclaimed Him to be the King of the Jews. No gifts of gold, frankincense, or myrrh were presented to Him. He was offered only wine mixed with myrrh to deaden His pain, and He refused to drink it.

The darkness had come because of a crucifixion - an ugly way to put people to death. When someone was crucified, it could sometimes take a couple days to die, as the executed criminal's diaphragm worked slower and slower until he was asphyxiated as his breaths became shallower and shallower.

Jesus was with two others on their crosses outside of Jerusalem. Lots of people had followed Him, listening intently to Him and singing His praises. Less than a week before, a crowd had called Him Saviour. A few hours before this moment, He had acknowledged that He was the King of the kingdom of truth. He was God's special soldier but now, this Warrior was dying.

This was the final battle - the big one. He had come into this world and had worked every day of His life to prepare for this. Your future, my future, and the future of everyone who has ever lived was hanging on the outcome of this battle, the greatest battle ever fought.

Websites that list "the greatest battles of all time" say their criteria is usually based on the influence of a battle on history. Battles, cultures, countries, leaders, and forms of government all have influence on history, but they come and go.

Jesus and this battle were different. The life of Jesus is the most significant single life in all of history, and what happened on the cross at His death changed the entire world and everyone who has ever lived.

Matthew writes, "⁴⁵ **At noon darkness came over the whole land and lasted until three in the afternoon.** ⁴⁶ **About three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**"

The physical agony that Jesus suffered must have been horrendous. He had already been distressed the night before in Gethsemane where His sweat became like drops of blood.¹ There was no sleep at all that night because of the trials. Then came the special punishment: the crown of thorns, the constant mocking, the pulling out of His beard, the blows to His face, the humiliation of having His clothing stripped off, and the cruel scourging that ripped out skin and flesh down to the bone with each lash. Weakened, He was forced to carry His own cross until He collapsed. Only after all that did they lay Him down on the cross and drive long nails through His wrists and feet and hoist the cross up as the

¹ Luke 22:44

soldiers and the Jewish leaders continued to mock Him. How could anyone do such things to another human being? That is our Saviour they are torturing!

But Jesus withstood that pain and agony without complaint! As a matter of fact, He spoke some amazing words on the cross. First, He offered a prayer asking the Father to forgive all those who had crucified and mocked Him.² Then He answered the desperate prayer of the criminal who believed in Him with a tremendous gospel promise of heaven that very day.³ And calmly and with a tender concern for His mother, He told John to care for her.⁴

But there was darkness, and we begin to realise that all His physical suffering was perhaps like an insect sting compared to the spiritual suffering that is happening on the cross. Why? Because the darkness shows us how much God hates sin, that terrible thing that always separates us from Him. The darkness is both God's reaction to the judicial murder of His Son, and God's dreadful judgment upon sin as suffered by His Son.

We may be grateful, in a way, for the darkness. It certainly must have shut up the mockers. But it also covered up what no eyes should ever have to see as Jesus was on that cross, *alone*, against all the forces of hell. Satan hates Jesus, and this is the moment when he now saw the Son of Man and Son of God at His weakest - where He may be vulnerable. Satan will do everything to force Jesus to give up His life's work of paying for your guilt and mine and for atoning for the whole world's sins.

The devil's lying reaches a fever pitch. Perhaps he told Jesus, "*You won't make any difference, Son of God. You are not big enough to cover the whole world's guilt and sin. The whole history of humanity is on my side. Why care about these people? They turned on You. Even Judas and Peter did it. Thousands will turn on You later.*"

The internal pain and pressure mount higher and higher. So much darkness! What have I done to cause this? What have you done that Jesus should suffer so? The weight of the sins of billions of people are pressing down - all the horrible things you and I have ever said, thought, and done.

Yet Jesus is fighting this powerful evil angel in this great darkness, alone, pure, holy, and faithful. Still loving us. Still holding His ground. Even a child can understand that this is why Jesus is both God and man! Man to be our substitute; God to pay for all the sins of humanity.

But now the worst part: The Father's white-hot anger is burning against Him. Think of the power that was His - the Creator of the universe who destroyed that world with a gigantic flood, who smashed Sodom and Gomorrah, who made the mountain tremble and shake for Moses - that's who is directing His full anger and fury against Jesus.

You can hear it in Jesus' voice as His tone changes. An awful and loud cry came from those tortured lungs. **"⁴⁶ About three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**"

This prayer of Jesus is from the first verse of Psalm 22. Although Matthew describes Jesus as saying only the first part of the first verse of this psalm out loud, perhaps Jesus was reciting the whole psalm in His mind. If so, by the time He had prayed through to the end, Jesus would have found the answer to His own question. "*You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him! Be afraid of Him, all you descendants of Israel! For He has not despised or detested the misery of the Wretched One or hidden His face from Him. Rather, when He cried to Him for help, He heard*" (Psalm 22:23-24).

Nevertheless, we know our triune God is one eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so maybe it's hard for us to get our head around the fact that the Son is now forsaken. The Father, source of all true love in this world, for a time, turned His back on the One whom He had so clearly declared at His baptism and on the transfiguration mountain that "*This is My Son, whom I love*" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). In the deepest depths of His humiliation, Jesus endured the God-forsakenness of hell for us. This was a necessary part of His work of redemption. The Apostle Paul would later write, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us*" (Galatians 3:13), and "*God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

² Luke 23:34

³ Luke 23:43

⁴ John 19:27

The Father had suspended His relationship with His Son so that His Son could pay for this entire world's sins. It must have torn at the Father's heart. His wrath was focused on the evil that Jesus bore because He so hates the malignant tumour of sin that is causing the human race to rot.

At the beginning of this suffering, Jesus had called Him "*Father.*" You can see the intimacy, the closeness. Now it is "**My God, My God**" as He loudly asked that big why question. Notice how formal that is?

You can see that while the relationship is broken, His trust in His Father is still strong, even as He is left alone. This is the moment of sheer horror for Jesus. It's the worst moment of His life, and His lonely suffering has reached its peak on that cross. It is here that the battle is either going to be won or lost as Jesus suffers for us. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah explains what is happening: "*Surely, He has taken on Himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him to be wounded, struck down by God and afflicted*" (Isaiah 53:4).

All this is because of us. Jesus remained perfect and holy in Himself *this entire time.* Yet our sin was charged to Him and He willingly paid for it. No matter how old you are, by now you have noticed something about yourself, as have I. We are not always aware of how much we sin. But we are aware that something is broken inside us. Often, we think that we shall just work harder to break that anger habit, that laziness habit, that lust habit, that greed habit, that overeating habit, and all the other sins we find ourselves falling back on. Here's a news flash: Our problem is bigger. We cannot work hard enough. We need a bigger Warrior who can purchase forgiveness for us all! This is God's grace in all its sweat and blood!

As the darkness began to retreat, the mockers started in again, thinking Jesus' cry to His Father was begging Elijah to come back: ⁴⁷ **When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "This man is calling Elijah."** ⁴⁸ **Immediately one of them ran, took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick and gave it to Him to drink.** ⁴⁹ **The others said, "Let Him alone! Let us see if Elijah is coming to save Him!"**

The end is near, things happened very quickly. Jesus was thirsty. "*When Jesus had taken the sour wine, He said, "It is finished"*" (John 19:30).

Mark tells us that the temple curtain was "*torn in two from top to bottom*" (Mark 15:38). Someone has said that that was God's way of saying "Amen" to Jesus' words "It is finished." That means that there is no more need for sacrificing. No more sheep, goats, or bulls need to be killed. There was no more need for priests or high priests. All the restrictions that were in place to keep God's chosen people separate were all removed. Every prophecy in the Old Testament about the coming Saviour has been fully kept. God has opened up access to Himself for all people, nations, languages, cultures, and generations through the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. He actually transferred the righteousness of Jesus to us!

Notice how we can tell that the sacrifice of Jesus is completed: He says, "*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit*" (Luke 23:46). He uses the name "*Father*" again! God's anger has been spent. The terrible separation between Father and Son no longer exists. That loud cry, "*It is finished,*" says everything. In this greatest battle of all time, the work of atoning for humanity is over! Jesus has crushed Satan's head, as predicted in Eden. It's a clear knockout blow. The devil is mortally wounded, still walking around, but he can no longer win. Satan had thought he had heaven's gates locked down tightly. Jesus took off the locks and has locked Satan down with a restricting chain!

Our home in heaven is prepaid! There is nothing you or I have to do to pay for our guilt and sin! We are forgiven!

His work is done. He's exhausted, but everything is just as it should be. So it's time for Him to leave. The soldiers, the mockers, hell, and Satan could not kill Him. Now, of His own free will, He gives His soul into His Father's loving hands. Our holy Jesus, who remained unspotted and unblemished as He experienced our hell, now offers His pure and perfect life as the final, once-and-for-all sacrifice that had been promised ever since Eden's garden! It is finished! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR GOOD FRIDAY

O God the Father Almighty, we praise You for Your eternal wisdom and mercy, in which You ordained that Your Son should be the sacrifice for our sin. We praise You that, by His being lifted up on the cross, He draws all people to Himself, taking away their iniquity, and granting them peace.

In this holy hour we thank and praise You for His sacrificial love, for His perfect obedience, for His patience in suffering, for His willingness to endure even the cross, and for His submission to death.

Help us to see, in the darkness that accompanied His dying, in the shaking of the earth, and in the splitting of the rocks, how great an evil was done by sinful people, how great a life was ended, and how great a death was inflicted. But through the tearing open of the veil of the Temple, and the opening of the graves of the saints, show us our sure entrance into the heavenly Holy of holies.

We thank You, O Father, for all that Jesus Your Son, our Lord, has done, for all that He has suffered, for all that He has given us, and for all that He has promised us.. We bow in adoration, and offer our prayers from the depths of grateful hearts. We join with the angels and with all Your redeemed people of every race, tribe, nation, and language in raising our song of thanksgiving: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise for ever.”

As we remember our Saviour’s passion, grant that we may treasure the things that belong to our salvation. As we remember His suffering, make us ready to pass through many troubles to enter the kingdom of God. As we remember His wounds, equip us to cope with every painful struggle. As we remember His crucifixion, teach us to crucify our worthless passions and desires. As we remember His death, help us to be ready to place our spirit in Your hands. As we remember His burial, help us to remember that He has trans-formed the graves of all His believers.

We rejoice, O Father, that we have received Your mercy and seen Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Give us Your continuing grace through Him who died and rose again for us, and who reigns as the Lamb on the throne for ever and ever. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

¹³ “Look! My Servant will be successful. He will be high, be lifted up and be highly exalted. ¹⁴ As there have been many who have been horrified because of You, — since His appearance has been more disfigured than any other man and His form more than any other human being, — ¹⁵ so He will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of Him. For they will see what they had not been told and will understand what they had not heard.”

^{53:1} Who has believed our Message? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² He grew up before Him like a young shoot, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him. He had nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we thought of Him as nothing. ⁴ Surely, He has taken on Himself our sufferings and carried our sorrows. Yet we considered Him to be wounded, struck down by God and afflicted. ⁵ However, He was pierced for our rebellious acts. He was bruised for our wrongdoings. The chastisement that brought us peace was on Him, and through His wounds we have been healed. ⁶ We have all gone astray, like sheep. Each one of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ Although He was

oppressed and afflicted, He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and, as a ewe is silent before those who shear off her wool, so He did not open His mouth. ⁸ He was taken away through oppression and without justice. As for His generation, who considered that He was cut off from the land of the living? Because of the rebellion of my people He was struck down. ⁹ He assigned His grave with wicked people but was with a rich man in His death, although He had done nothing violent, and there was no deceit in His mouth. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, it was the will of the LORD to crush Him with suffering. When You make His life a sacrifice for guilt, He will see His offspring. He will have a long life, and the will of the LORD will be successful in His hand. ¹¹ Because of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied.

“Through His knowledge, My righteous Servant will justify many and bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I shall divide Him a portion among great people, and He will divide the plunder with strong people, because He poured out His life to death and was numbered with wrongdoers. Nevertheless, He has carried the sin of many people and intercedes for the wrongdoers.”

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great High Priest, who has gone through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us cling to what we confess! ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses. However, we have One who has been

tempted in every way like us. Yet He was without sin.

¹⁶ Therefore, let us come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help us when we need it! ...

^{5:7} During His days in the human nature, Jesus offered prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears, to the One who could save Him from death; and, because He feared God, He was heard. ⁸ Although Jesus is the Son, He learned obedience from the things that He suffered. ⁹ When He was perfected, He also became the Source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.

John 19:17-30

¹⁷ Jesus went out, carrying His own cross, to the place that was called “the Place of the Skull,” which is called “Golgotha” in Aramaic. ¹⁸ There they crucified Him with two other men, one on each side, with Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate also wrote a notice and put it on the cross. It read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

²⁰ Therefore, many Jews read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The notice had been written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

²¹ Therefore, the High Priests of the Jews told Pilate, “Do not write: ‘The King of the Jews,’ but: ‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews!’”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His outer garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, and the undergarment. The undergarment was without a seam, woven from the top in one piece. ²⁴ Therefore, they said to one another, “Let us not tear it but let us throw dice for it, to decide who will get it!”

This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled that says: “They divided My outer garments among them and cast lots for My clothing.”

So, that is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Jesus’ mother, His mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene were standing near the cross of Jesus.

²⁶ Therefore, when Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, there is your son.” ²⁷ Then He said to the disciple, “There is your mother.”

From that time on, this disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, knowing that everything had now been finished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

²⁹ A jar full of sour wine had been placed there. So, they put a sponge full of the sour wine on hyssop and lifted it to His mouth.

³⁰ When Jesus had taken the sour wine, He said, “It is finished.”

Then He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.