

## ***Good Friday***

The accounts of Jesus' crucifixion in the Gospels can be divided up into two sections. There is the part about His extreme suffering on the cross, but when He dies things change, and there are many things that point to the victory that He won for us by His innocent death on the cross. Tonight I would like to divide my sermon into those two parts, first looking at His suffering for us and then the victory that His death brings to us.

### **Part 1 - Text: Matthew 27:32-50**

**Theme:** "How He Suffered for Us"

Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. It was one of the worst means of torture ever invented. There is hardly a depiction of Christ's crucifixion, which accurately describes it, because we would not be able to look at a picture that describes just how horrible it was. We would have to turn our head. Even our crucifixes make it look far to pleasant for Him.

The Romans generally crucified people whom they wanted to make an example of, such as escaped slaves (6,000 were crucified with Spartacus), pirates or insurrectionists. They would be crucified along a main road with a sign over their head, which stated the crime that the person committed. The condemned was often whipped and beaten severely before the crucifixion. Then they carried the heavy cross beam to the place of execution, walking behind a person who carried the sign that stated the crime that they had committed. In other places of the empire people would often languish for days on a cross until they finally died. Then their bodies would be left on the cross. The Jews, however, forbade the bodies to remain on the cross overnight. Therefore the legs would be broken, so that the death would come sooner and the body could be taken down and buried. It was not abolished until the emperor Constantine became a Christian about the year 300 AD.

Jesus suffered the physical pain that any crucified person would suffer, but His spiritual anguish was even worse. Almost all of His followers had forsaken Him. Except for John all of the disciples ran. His mother was the only member of His family who was there. The only people who remained were John, His mother, and a few other women. He was surrounded by enemies, and they were tormenting Him. He had the power to come down from the cross if He wanted to. They kept challenging Him to do so, "*Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God.*" This came from the chief priests, those who passed by, and for a time even the robbers that were crucified with Him. They all tormented Him.

But the worst part of it was that He was even forsaken by the Father, whom He loved. He cried out, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" This is the cry of Psalm 22, which we just recited. That psalm describes so well the suffering of our Lord Jesus on the cross. They devil had His way with Jesus for those three hours. He was suffering hell, which is abandonment by God. When you consider Jesus on the cross, you see what it is like to suffer hell. All goodness is gone, and there is nothing but evil left.

The hymn, “Stricken Smitten, and Afflicted” describes this well when it says,  
Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning,  
Was there ever grief like His?  
Friends through fear His cause disowning,  
Foes insulting His distress;  
Many hands were raised to wound Him,  
None would intervene to save;  
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him  
Was the stroke that justice gave.

But it is important for us to realize that He did this all for us. No one took His life from Him. He went to that horrible cross to suffer and die in our place. We should have suffered like this for eternity in hell because of our sins. Yet, He willingly went in our place to suffer for all of our sins. He bore the complete punishment for all of our sins on the cross. He was forsaken by His Father, so that we could be reconciled with God.

As Jesus suffered on that cross, there was something remarkable, even though He was forsaken by the world and even His Father, He would not let us go. He gave His life for this world that forsook Him. Even as He cried out to His Father in pain, He still called Him, “My God.” In Psalm 22 He cries out, “*But You, O Lord, be not far off; O My strength come quickly to help Me.*” He clung to His Father and He clung to us on that cross. By His suffering on that cross in our place, He brought the two of us together.

## **Part 2 - Text: Matthew 27:51-56**

**Theme:** “He Conquered Death by His Death for us”

You cannot help but notice how the accounts in the Gospel have an abrupt change in tone as soon as Jesus dies. There is a sense of victory in everything that happens from this point forward.

Both Matthew and John write that with a loud cry Jesus gave up His Spirit. John tells us what that cry was, “*It is finished.*” This is the same phrase in Greek as the final verse of Psalm 22, “*He has done it.*” Notice those words, “*He gave up His Spirit.*” It is an unusual way to describe someone’s death. It is not used anywhere else in the Bible. It shows clearly that Jesus death was an act of His will. He once said that no one takes His life from Him. He gave it up of His own accord. When all was fulfilled, when He had paid for all of our sins in full and could say, “It is finished,” He laid down His life.

At that point interesting things began to happen. Immediately the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This curtain divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The Holy Place was where the priests went daily to light the menorah and the incense altar and to change the show bread. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the day of Atonement to atone for the sins of the people. The tearing of this curtain showed that Christ had atoned for our sins once and for all on the cross. There was no longer any reason for the priest to make atonement year after year. Those sacrifices pointed to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Now our

salvation had been accomplished for good.

Then the earth shook. Rocks began to split, and several people rose for a short time and appeared to many people after Jesus' resurrection. They were an example of the final resurrection that will come because of Jesus' redemption for us. As Adam's sin brought death to all people, so Jesus' righteous death in our place has brought eternal life. His death means life for us.

Then the centurion, who had witnessed everything from the time when Jesus was arrested until He died, made a startling confession. He praised God and exclaimed, "*Surely, He was the Son of God.*" No one ever understood who Jesus was until He died. Now someone finally gets it right. The centurion confesses that He is God's Son.

All of these things showed that the Father answered Jesus' prayer on the cross. As He suffered, Jesus prayed for His Father's help. At His death, the Father received Jesus' Spirit in heaven. There His Spirit would rest while Jesus' body rested in the grave. Three days later Jesus rose and showed that He had done it! He had accomplished our salvation. The end of Psalm 22 bursts into praise that God did not hide His face from His Son. He listened to His cry to help. He received His Son into His glory. Because of that we are reconciled with God and will live with Him forever.

Jesus conquered death for you. His victory over sin, death, and all the power of the devil on that cross is yours through faith. Through baptism in His name, we are united with Him in His death and resurrection, so that we die to sin and rise to a new life in His name. In Him God is now our dear Father, the friend who loves us most. He forgives all of our sins, heals all of our sorrows, and gives us the gift of eternal life.

May our prayer always be the verse that we are about to sing,

In perfect love He dies  
for Me He dies for Me.  
O all-atoning sacrifice,  
I cling by faith to Thee.

Amen.

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