The Death of Jesus

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0:00] Amen. Please turn back with me this morning to Matthew chapter 27, verses 45 through 50, as we make our way through this most magnificent of chapters.

Where the whole realm of nature mine, it would be an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.
As he surveyed the wondrous cross, thus wrote the marvelous English hymn writer Isaac Watts, how is it with you today? As you survey the wondrous cross on which Jesus, the Prince of Glory, died, what offering will you make to him?
Will you offer him your praise? Will you offer him your faith? Will you offer him your ambitions and your dreams, your relationships, your life, your successes and your failures?
Will you offer him your weekdays and your weekends? Will you offer him your thoughts, your words and your deeds? What will you offer him?
[1:29] These verses record for us the greatest mystery in the universe. How it is that the Son of God, the Prince of Glory, the light and life of the world should die.

Mystery, yes. Majesty, more so. For this scene of devastation and terror on Golgotha's cross surely demands my soul, my life, my all.
The death of Jesus is surrounded by such mystery and such majesty. There's darkness and superstition. There's death. There's salvation. What will you offer Jesus for all he's done for you? Forbearing the penalty of your sin and dying the death? You deserve to die. The great English missionary, C.T. Studd famously said, if Christ be God and died for me, then there's no offering too small to make.
Sorry. There's no sacrifice too great for me to make for him. There's no offering too great for me to make for him. I want us this morning to try and reverently unpack this passage under four headings.
[2:53] Darkness in verse 45. Desolation in verse 46. Difference in verses 47 through 49. And deliverance in verse 50.

All the way through, ask yourself at every stage, given such amazing love on the part of the Savior, what can I offer him in return?
Surely such love demands at least my faith. First of all then we have darkness in verse 45. Darkness. Darkness. Darkness is unsettling. For many, darkness is scary. We must have a light on because being alone in the dark is not an option for many of us.
That's quite natural. We're not creatures of the darkness. We're creatures of the light. We're asleep when it's dark. And when it's light, we're awake. Our eyes are not physically adapted to see the darkness.
[4:02] And our other senses can't quite make up for it. Now even though we live in the northern hemisphere, we're not used to it being dark at 12 noon.

Midday, even when it's cloudy here in Glasgow, is at least light. But not for Jesus hanging on the cross. At a high noon on that fateful day, the sun stopped shining and darkness fell upon the land.
Now in the Bible, especially in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, darkness is the symbol of judgment. Think for example of the ten plagues which God sent upon the land of Egypt in the days of Moses.
Darkness was one of those plagues. We read that for three days there was darkness over the whole land of Egypt. Think also of the minor prophets.
Those strange prophecies at the end of the Old Testament dominated by the theme of God's judgment. For example, in Amos chapter 5, the day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment, is described in these terms.

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[5:17] It is a day of darkness and not light. Again in Zephaniah chapter 1 verse 15, it is described in these terms.

A day of wrath is that day. A day of distress and anguish. A day of ruin and devastation. A day of darkness and gloom.
A day of clouds and thick darkness. Here we have it then in verse 45. High noon on a hill just outside Jerusalem.
And the darkness falls thick upon the land. It's a day of ruin and wrath. It's a day of darkness and devastation.
It's a day of justice. It's a day of judgment. For three hours the day is as night. The sun may be shining. But midday is now midnight.
[6:16] It's darker than a thunderstorm. It's darker than if a large cloud should have moved in front of the sun. It was supernatural darkness. Rather like that which fell upon the land of Egypt.

Divine judgment is being executed. But who is God judging? Who is God judging?
Upon whom is God's wrath being poured out? Now given the absurdity of the situation. We might expect that it was the people of Israel who God was judging.
After all they are guilty of the most heinous sin in history. They have condemned the son of God to death. They are proud and unrepentant murderers at this stage.
It was them who called out in the city square. Crucify him. Crucify him. They owed everything to God. And now they are killing his son.
[7:20] Yes and mocking him at the same time. Laughing at his pain. Is it them? Upon whom God's wrath is being poured?

Is it them who are being judged? Is darkness falling on the land on their account? Again given the uniqueness of the situation.
We might expect it was the Romans God was judging. After all they are unclean. They are directly responsible for hammering in the nails to the hands and feet of our Lord.
They have beaten him. They have tortured him. And now they are killing him. This is but the latest act of terror in an empire based upon violence, war and slavery.
An empire of a thousand years and over a million square miles. And now its soldiers are sitting at the foot of the cross and they are playing dice.
[8:25] They are drinking and gambling while the son of God hangs and dies above them. Is it them? Upon whom God's wrath is being poured? Is darkness falling upon them?

Are they being judged? Jesus, the Son of God, whose words and works of love and righteousness have so provoked the authorities.
Jesus, the Son of God in whose mouth there was no deceit. Jesus, the Son of God who healed the sick and gave the blind their sight. Jesus, the Son of God who proclaimed the fatherhood of God and his divine care of the poor and the meek.
This Jesus, surely it's not he who is being judged. He is the only righteous person there. Surely it isn't Jesus who is being judged.
Surely the darkness doesn't signify judgment being executed on God's own beloved Son. A little earlier in Matthew's gospel, Jesus told his disciples parables about what it would be like on the last day.
[9:44] Chapter 22, he told them about the banquet of a great king. And a guest who was not dressed in wedding robes. And the king noticed and said to his servants, Again in Matthew 25, Jesus told his disciples about a great master who had entrusted one of his servants with one talent.

And having returned from a long journey, called his servant to him and asked him, What have you done with what I entrusted to you? Well, that wicked and lazy servant had dug a big hole in the ground and hidden the talent there.
To him the master said, Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness in that place. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
Who then has been cast into that outer darkness on Golgotha's hill? The wicked and lazy servant? The disrespectful wedding guest?
No, it's the beloved Son being cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's that faithful and beloved servant being cast into the outer darkness.
[11:09] It's absurd. It just seems so crazy. But the darkness of judgment rests upon Jesus himself. It's he who is being judged.

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Not the vicious religious leaders of the state. Not the violent Roman Empire. But Jesus.
Where the whole realm of nature mine, That we've been offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.
The darkness fell. So when we survey that wondrous cross, We do so with squinting, straining eyes.
But there on that cross is our Lord. And he's there for us. He is enduring the darkness for the wicked and for the lazy. For the apathetic, the rebellious.
[12:14] For you. And for me. And he's offered himself unto the darkness of judgment for us. What then shall we offer to him?

Second in verse 46. We have desolation. Desolation. For three long hours, Jesus hung on the cross in the darkness.
Every week together, we recite the Apostles' Creed. The summary statement of what all Christians everywhere have always believed. We say of Jesus. That he descended into hell.
It is here. For those three hours of darkness that Jesus goes down into the pit of hell. Bearing the penalty of our sin. And the punishment of our iniquity.
Our inner darkness became his experience. In the hell he himself had created. For the fallen angels. You know, when we go through a difficult experience.
[13:19] And later on someone asks us what it was like. We might crudely say. It was hellish. Jesus' experience for those three hours.

Wasn't hellish. It was hell. It wasn't like hell. It was hell. It was hell. If for those three hours you had asked the question.
Where is Jesus? You could have rightly said. That exactly. At exactly the same time. He was both on the cross. And in hell. The judgment of God exacted upon his son.
Brought him down into hell itself. At that precise moment. When it would seem impossible. That even God himself could cope for another moment.
Jesus cries out. Eli. Eli. Lema sabachthani. At the equivalent of 3pm. That's the ninth hour. Jesus turns to that which is most familiar to him.
[14:26] To describe the pain he is experiencing. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? Psalm 22 verse 1. It's been so dark for so very long.

And the pain is so intense. That at the peak of it. Jesus cries out. The younger ones among us won't know what a pressure cooker is.
But we used to use it back in the old days. For making stews and soups. At that point. When the pressure in the pan became so intense. The release valve at the top of the pressure cooker.
Would let out steam. That's the cry. The pressure is so intense. Upon the soul of Jesus.
That he simply must release it. Because this is the very nature of what Jesus is enduring at this very point. The forsakenness of God.
[15:27] Historically some commentators saw significance in the way in which Jesus addresses him as God here and not Father. Suggesting that perhaps Jesus lost all awareness of the fatherhood of God during those three hours of darkness.

More recently commentators see less significance in Jesus' use of God and not Father. They say the most important word in this cry is the word forsaken.
Why have you forsaken me? Jesus has experienced the forsakenness of God. That's the nature of hell forsaken by God.
Desolated by God. Punished by God. Sent to hell by God. Now I'm the very first to admit that we are straining at the very limit of what we can know about the cross.
It's so mysterious. And yet I know this. To be forsaken by God does not mean to be abandoned by God. The two are not the same. God did not abandon his son upon the cross.
[16:39] Passively leaving Jesus to his own fate. God forsook his son on the cross. Actively punishing his son in our place.

God did not turn his face away from his son on the cross. God did not give his son the cold shoulder or the silent treatment.
Rather as we read in Isaiah 53. God crushed his son. God forsook his son. God penalized his son. God punished his son.
All those horrific punishments we read of in the Old Testament were meted out upon him in those three hours. He was cursed beyond measure.

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He was sent out into the wilderness of hell like the scapegoat for the sins of his people. Scarred and pierced and crushed. The infinite God of heaven and earth is pouring out his infinite just wrath upon his son.
[17:47] Whatever Jesus may have endured at the hands of the Roman soldiers. Whatever he endured at the hands of his own people. It was as nothing.

It was a mere pinprick. Compared to all he is now suffering. His father is actively pouring the full weight of his wrath.
Upon our sin. Upon his son. You couldn't see the suffering.
You could only hear his voice crying out, My God, my God. Why are you crushing me? Why are you forsaking me? No one has ever endured pain like this.
A world of sin laid on the shoulders. And him bearing the punishment for it all. We recall the wonderful words of that hymn, The Power of the Cross.
[18:53] Oh, to see the pain written on your face. Bearing the awesome weight of sin. Every bitter thought.

Every evil deed. Crowning your blood-stained brow. No one's ever heard hell before. That is until we hear the Son of God Crying out his forsakenness.
He bore our desolation. We should have borne the weight of our own sin against God. Should be us there in hell. But he bore it for us.
He became a curse for us. Hell is the active forsakenness of God. The active punishment. The turning of the screw.
Eternally and infinitely of our sin. But Jesus has endured it on our behalf. The divine holocaust. I don't mean to scare anyone.
[20:00] Not for one moment. Any more than the Bible does. Enter even for a millisecond. Into the forsakenness of hell.

The infinite crushing of God. You will go quite mad. But that's what awaits all those Who choose to try and deal with their own sins.
As opposed to those who by faith Lay them upon the shoulders of Jesus. Why would you do this? And why would you go there? When all the time Jesus says Believe in me and you shall have eternal life.
Faith. Faith. Trust. He's bearing the load of a sinful world on his shoulders. Faith. Trust.
He's bearing yours also. Faith. It's not too much to ask, is it? If Christ be God and died for me Then no sacrifice is too great for me to make for him.
[21:00] Yes, perhaps even for the first time today To believe and trust in him. Third, from verse 47 through 49 Difference.

Difference. Given the shortness of time I don't want to dwell for too long On this episode of those gathered Around the cross Offering Jesus wine and a stick to drink We've already dealt with how in verse 34 Before the nails were driven into his hands They offered him a pain-killing drink Of wine mixed with gall He refused it In order to keep his mind active So that he may willingly, actively, and consciously Offer himself up as the sacrifice In our place But what I do want to draw your attention to For a moment Is to what those gathered at the foot of the cross Are saying to one another They say This man's calling Elijah Wait and see whether Elijah comes to save him Elijah would be a most welcome visitor at this point After all, he was the Old Testament prophet Who did not see death But was rather transported straight To heaven in a chariot of fire
Did these crowds think That was what Jesus was calling for? That God would transport him straight into heaven Without seeing death?
Chances are they misheard Jesus calling Eli And perhaps they thought he was calling for Elijah They thought perhaps that Jesus had had enough And was now calling upon God To send Elijah to rescue him from the cross To bear him up to heaven In that great fiery chariot Even at this late stage The sun hasn't shone for three hours They still haven't been humbled They continue to mock Jesus What they don't realize Is that there is no hope of Elijah coming to save Jesus They have their mathematics All the wrong way around Jesus is dying upon the cross To save Elijah Not the other way around By dying the way he is By enduring the desolation and darkness Jesus is saving Elijah
Not Elijah coming in a fiery chariot To save Jesus That's why I'm calling this point difference The difference between Elijah saving Jesus And Jesus saving Elijah Elijah was taken up into heaven In

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a fiery chariot The vindication of a life of faithful service To God He was taken up to heaven in glory Jesus is going up to heaven On a fearful cross The condemnation of a life Where he has chosen to take our sins upon himself He is dying in shame The two could not be more different But different most of all than this Elijah doesn't save Jesus Rather by virtue of all he is achieving on the cross He is saving men and women like Elijah Don't be fooled by appearances
[24:32] Elijah departed in glory Jesus dying in shame It is Jesus who is saving Elijah And not the other way around Don't ever forget Jesus is dying here Not for his own benefit Because somehow he enjoyed the pain This is not some great cosmic Divine miscarriage of justice A poor boy in the wrong place At the wrong time He is dying to save us From the greatest to the least From the wisest to the most foolish He is dying to save us Because we cannot save ourselves And again faith and trust Faith and trust I believe that Elijah And all the Old Testament saints of God Were saved by their faith in the Christ Who would come For us it is a little different We are saved by faith in the Jesus Who has come

Except that perhaps we know more than they ever did Faith and trust in Jesus That is the path to salvation Darkness, desolation, difference And then finally Deliverance in verse 50 Deliverance The dying of Jesus May have been extremely violent But the death of Jesus itself Was relatively peaceful In verse 50 we read And Jesus cried out again With a loud voice And yielded up his spirit Matthew doesn't tell us What Jesus cried out But he does tell us That Jesus having cried out With a loud voice Yielded up his spirit The fact that Jesus Was able to cry out With such a loud voice Prior to his death Shows he is still in control Of his faculties
You will know that those Who are approaching death May speak only in whispers They are physically Emotionally And mentally Unable to raise Their voices But Jesus By raising his voice Shows he is still In control Of his faculties And then He yields up his spirit He lets go He consciously Yields his spirit To God No one has taken it From him Rather Of his own In his own Of his own accord While still In full control Of his capacities He offers it Up to God To say that he dies It really sounds So passive Because the truth is The Roman soldiers Did not kill Jesus He willingly Offered up his life On the cross And now at the very end Of things
He refuses to come down From the cross He consciously Willingly And actively Completes his mission And life By yielding up His spirit To God We've said it All the way along Since the very beginning Of our series Of sermons In the gospel Of Matthew Back in 2013 It has always Been Jesus Who is in control Of the situation At all times Always Jesus Not the religious Authorities Not the crowds Not the Romans Not the disciples But Jesus He has decided The time And the place And the means Of his sacrificial death His whole life Has been leading To this Very point The darkness Desolation Difference And deliverance What we have here
At the very end Is the completion Of his mission Thus he offers up His life for us He doesn't go part way And then back down He doesn't go part way And then when the going Gets too tough Call upon the angels To rescue him from death Rather Just like Old Magnus Magnus In a mastermind Used to say I've started So I'll finish He keeps going To the very end Yes the very end Yes to the very end Even to death So we close precisely With the same language We began with Where the whole realm Of nature Mine That would be an offering Far too small Love so amazing So divine Demands my soul My life My all As he surveyed That wondrous cross The marvelous
[29:35] English hymn writer Isaac Watts Wrote these wonderful words How is it with you today? Look into your heart As you survey The wondrous cross On which the prince Of glory died What offering Will you make To him?

Will you offer him Your praise? Will you offer him Your faith? Will you offer him Your ambitions And your dreams? Will you offer him Your successes And your failures?
Your relationships? Will you offer him Your career? Your studies? Your life? Will you offer him Your weekends And your weekdays?
Will you offer him Your leisure time? Will you offer him Your hobbies? Will you offer him your money? Will you offer him your thoughts, your words, and your deeds?
What will you offer him? Let us pray. There are, O Lord, some matters in your word which are so hard to swallow for us.
[30:53] It's not that we don't understand what the words mean. We just can't believe it to be true. We can't believe you could be so good to us.

It should have been us on that cross, being in the awesome weight of our own sin, being punished, being condemned for willfully turning away from you.

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But it was not us on that cross. It was your own son descending into hell, being crushed, punished, and penalized for us.
As a result then, Lord, we ask that from the oldest of us to the youngest of us, you give us a heart of wisdom and gratitude. that today we would say, I love salvation.
Take the cup on God's name will I call. Before the connegation, I will praise you. We ask these things in Jesus' name.
[31:57] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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