

Two Cries and One Confession (Evening Service)

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Date: 25 March 2018

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everyone. Crucifixion was the supreme Roman punishment, incredibly brutal.

We get our English word excruciating from the same root word as crucifixion. In the ancient Near East, crucifixion was considered worse than decapitation, worse than being killed by wild animals, and worse than being burnt alive, which was a few of the other options.

Roman citizens weren't crucified. It wasn't allowed by law. Cicero, the statesman, the Roman statesman, he argued that the cross was such a horror that Roman citizens shouldn't even be allowed to hear the word cross.

And yet, despite all that, the cross stands as the central symbol of our faith.

So, let's get into the passage and find out why this Palm Sunday. So, at this point in the story, verse 45 of chapter 27, so Jesus has been on the cross for a while at this point.

[1 : 20] And the actual crucifixion was dealt with a few verses beforehand. And despite what I said about how awful it was, it's dealt with in quite a detached way.

It simply says in verse 35, So, the meaning of the cross is obviously somewhere else, in something else about the cross, not the physical agony and pain of it.

And our passage tries to capture the meaning of it. The first thing I want to say is this. At the cross, God was angry.

That's the first thing it's trying to tell us. At the cross, God was angry. Verse 45, it was the sixth hour, it says. That's midday, using the sort of old school timing there.

It was midday, and for three hours, the world went dark. And it wasn't an eclipse, because eclipses last about, you know, five minutes or something. So, what does it mean that the world went dark for three hours?

[2 : 30] In the Old Testament, darkness always symbolizes God's judgment. So, God's judgment and anger were present at Calvary.

Now, I'm not sure what you think about this idea of an angry God. Perhaps you're visiting with us this evening, and you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian.

And this idea of an angry God just sounds very unattractive to you. Maybe you just don't like the idea. Some people definitely can only imagine God being loving and never angry.

But imagine a God that is never angry for a moment, just as a thought experiment. Imagine if we had a God that was never angry.

Let me give you a scenario. So, unless you've been living in a cave for the last six months, you would have noticed that powerful white men are just dropping like flies at the moment.

[3 : 28] successful, you know, really powerful men are finally facing accusations of sexual exploitation and abuse of younger women.

And the world is very angry about this. Rightfully so. There is a lot of dodginess being going on, and people have been getting away with a lot of horrible things.

And these men have been sort of, it's catching up with them. Do we want a God, this God who is only just loving, do we really want a God who would look at that situation, you know, with like Harvey Weinstein and stuff, and say something like, ah, you know, boys will be boys.

Let's move on. What's done is done. Just a little bit of fun. Is that the kind of God that we want? A God who is happy just to sweep our sin and rebellion under the carpet, like a sort of a kindly old grandfather who winks at our bad behavior.

Now, God is holy and he is just. He's not going to do that. God is loving. That is central to his character. But he also gets angry.

[4 : 56] And he's also a God of judgment. And on Calvary, his righteous, just, and settled anger descends, represented by darkness.

So that's what the darkness means. Now, the shock, I think, of the passage is where that anger is directed. So the first point is there's anger.

God is angry at the cross. At the cross, God is angry. The second point is this. Verse 46 tells us that the anger of God has not been poured out on the Romans and stuff. It's been poured out on Christ. Verse 46. In about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lemma sabathane, which is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now, that verse is an interesting one, isn't it?

Like, if you're reading the story of Jesus for the first time, somebody says, just, why don't you just read the gospel? You're not a Christian. Somebody says, just read the gospel, you know. Read Matthew's gospel. And you get to that point, you'd think, you could think to yourself, huh, look at that.

[6 : 03] Jesus, he's finally cracked up. He's finally cracked up. All the pressure. It makes complete sense. He's given up on God. I mean, that's kind of what it sounds like.

If someone was making this stuff up, like if someone was writing the story of Jesus to promote Jesus and kind of, you know, lying about what happened, you probably wouldn't make these the last words of Jesus, would you?

Because they sound unheroic. Here he is, the guy who's been talking it up for three years.

At the end, kind of stumbles. The last words of Buddha were, strive without ceasing. The last words of Muhammad, something like, make me your companion in heaven, he says to God.

I mean, those sounds, they sound a bit better, doesn't it? Don't they? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Is Jesus falling apart here? Has he given up on God?

[7 : 15] What's behind these words? And how does it relate to the first point? Well, it is a question. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But it's not a question looking for an answer. Jesus is quoting Psalm 22 as a way of expressing what he's going through. So what is he going through? Well, did you notice that he doesn't say, my hands, my feet, my head.

He has nails through his hands, through his feet, and the crown of thorns is pressed down on his head. But he's not complaining about that stuff. He's not screaming about the pain he's feeling, the physical pain he's feeling.

What he screams about is, my God, why have you forsaken me? He's screaming about what he's experiencing spiritually, which is God's anger.

And what does that look like? On the cross, it looked like abandonment. That Jesus, who was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, but on the cross, it would have felt like to him that he was cast out, that he was separated.

[8 : 29] Now, rejection is an awful thing. There's no greater agony, I think, than to lose love.

But it really depends on how long or deep that love is as well, I think. So being rejected by a friend, that's not very nice. Being rejected by a boyfriend or girlfriend, oh, that's brutal.

Being rejected by a family member, that is horrible. Now, think about Jesus here. Jesus, in a relationship with his Father, a relationship that was beginningless and more intimate than we can, you know, ever possibly wrap our heads around.

And so when the Father rejects the Son, abandons the Son, turns his back on his Son, breaks that relationship on the cross, that experience for Christ would have been worse than anything that we can possibly imagine.

And it caused Christ to scream. Amazingly, we see in verse 50 that Christ chose this.

[9 : 44] This wasn't a surprise to him. He chose to do this. Verse 15, Jesus cried out again, this is the second scream, with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

And that's important, that yielded up his spirit part there. Because it tells us that Jesus chose this.

Actually, if you read all the Gospels, nowhere in any of the Gospels does it say that Jesus died. None of the writers of the Gospel give the impression that death claimed Jesus. It is always stated with a sense of volunteerism that Christ yielded.

He gave up. He let go. He chose. He chose to die. And why would he do that? Well, the passage gives us a number of signs to help us understand why he would do this.

God is angry. He pours his anger out on Jesus. Why? So we have these signs in the passage, these little tiny, little mini stories here.

[10:52] And it's important that they're there because, you know, most of the people were clueless. Most of the spectators watching this didn't know what was going on. Jesus saying, Jesus saying, Eli, Eli, you know, the number of them think the Eli part is him saying Elijah.

Like he's crying out to Elijah because apparently rabbis would cry out to Elijah sometimes if they were sort of in this sort of life or death situation. And they give him some sour wine, which, I mean, you can read that like they're being nice to him.

The more cynical reading, which is probably the right one, I think, is that they were giving him really sour, bitter wine to keep him awake, to stimulate him so the pain continued.

Because you see there, you see in the passage, they just want to see what's going to happen. They just expect that Jesus is dying. Maybe something weird is going to happen.

Let's stick around and find out. So they're completely clueless. And so the passage gives us these signs to help explain what is actually going on, what everyone seems to be missing here.

[12:10] So the signs are the curtain tears in half and the earth shook and people are raised from the dead. Let's spend most of our time on this curtain business because I think that's the big one here. Verse 51, And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

So the temple was where people gathered for worship and there was this room right in the middle called the Holy of Holies. No one could go in there except the high priest once a year. It was where God's presence especially dwelt.

And there was this huge curtain that blocked off the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. And they would do that. That was a good thing to do because it wasn't safe for people to be in the presence of God.

So the whole temple system and structure and the way it was like architecturally designed kept people from God's presence for the safety of the people who had no right to enter the presence of God.

So they had this huge curtain that was 60 feet high and 30 feet wide and we're told it was about as thick as the palm of your hand. This was a big curtain to keep people out.

[13:16] And when Christ died, when he yielded up his spirit, it tore in half. And it's interesting to note, it tore from top to bottom. And it's a point, a detail that lets us know that this was God's work, that no person did this.

And what does that mean? It meant that the need to be protected from God's presence was now obsolete. So the curtain was this barrier that said, don't come to God's presence.

You are not fit to be there. You are not fit to come into his presence. And that barrier was torn down. That barrier was ripped in half.

Because God was saying to people, you are now welcome. Come in. You are welcome. Come in. I want you to come into my house. Come in and be a part of my family.

And this could only happen because Jesus took our rejection on himself. See, we deserve to be rejected by God. We deserve that anger, but instead of us being rejected, Christ was rejected instead in our place.

[14:31] Now God says to us, welcome. Welcome. I've done it. Nothing more needs to be done. You're welcome. Jesus' work on the cross was complete.

See, before the cross, the priests in the temple would perform all these sacrifices and they repeat them day after day after day after day or year after year depending on the kind of like the particular feast or sacrifice it was and the very repetition of these things.

It said something and it demonstrated that the sacrificial work was never finished. It was never enough. But Jesus on the cross offered once and for all time one sacrifice for all sins no more was needed after that.

My house is often a disaster. Our kids, I blame my children. They have very sticky hands and like whenever you touch anything like if this was in my house you'd touch it.

This feels really nice, right? You'd touch this in my house and it would just it would be crunchy.

There'd be lots of little things stuck all over it. You know, I don't know what it is.

[15:48] And there's I feel like I pick up the same toys 50 times a day and we sweep probably 5 times a day and there's always like a half eaten muffin like just just a little bit under the couch just right there.

We haven't had muffins for like a couple months but I like I swear to you I don't know where it comes from but every day there's some like a bagel or I don't know where they come from but they're half eaten and we try and keep it clean but it's you can't win that battle, right? You think and you have this in your mind you think well maybe what I can do is like a big spring clean like if I could just clean it up like amazingly well if I could just like of the stove or the outside of the fridge like a stainless steel fridge you know if I could just if I could just do the definitive clean it would be the last time we'd ever have to clean it but it's a fantasy isn't it? Like it's a complete fantasy there is no definitive clean of your home but this is this is I'm trying to build a picture of this is what actually Jesus did on the cross this amazing miraculous thing it's one clean one sacrifice forever Jesus sacrificed I mean he put his body on the line it was awful but he sacrificed the most precious thing to him which was his relationship with the father for that time on the cross he was rejected so we don't have to be and this is radical grace radical grace and to show the magnitude of it and the width and the depth of this grace we're given this tiny little testimony of someone grasping actually grasping who Jesus is and amongst all of the people who just were just who hated Jesus or were just spectators waiting for something weird to happen there was this one dude who actually who got it verse 54 when the centurion and those who were with them keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place they were filled with awe and said truly this is the son of God it's so interesting to me that it's not one of the disciples who gets it or even like a Jewish onlooker or like one of the Pharisees one of the professional religious people it's a Gentile and not just any Gentile a Roman Gentile not just any Roman Gentile a Roman soldier and not just any Roman soldier remember these were the occupying forces not just any Roman soldier the one who was overseeing Christ's death the most unlikely recipient of God's grace and yet he's he got it and Matthew is telling us that story and he's pointing us forward and he's saying this is what the cross means the cross means that what I have done means that anyone can come to me anyone can come to me let me finish up here Christ was crucified the curtain ripped the earth shook rocks were split some dead saints came alive and Matthew wants us to know that look whatever was going on here it is much bigger than just one man dying this is much bigger than one man dies on a cross and it's really sad if you are here and you are not a Christian welcome I hope this has been a helpful service to you but I want you to know and this passage is telling you this that you can come to God no matter what your life looks like no matter what you've done no matter how bad you think you are or how good you think you are you can come to God and you can receive new life it's not all these people rising from the dead it's all about it's a picture of new life you can get that new life a new beginning with God because of what [20 : 00] Jesus has done and if you are here and you are a Christian this is a reminder of what has been done for us you don't need to recreate the sacrificial system in your life and all the little ways that we do it trying to earn our favour with God the sacrifice has been made the definitive clean has happened once and for all and you have peace with God and you should live like that and you should live into the wonder of that Amen