

Luke 23:44-56 "The Dying Savior"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Amen. Thank you all so much. I love that song, He has beaten death at death's own game. Isn't that the story of the Easter week and of the gospel message?

As I set up here for just a minute, I'm excited about Easter. I'm really thankful for Cole's words. I hope you're able to celebrate with us at some of these special events this week. And also invite your friends to be a part of that. You'll see even as you go look at the events, there are ways you can serve to help us be prepared to welcome people.

We do need your help with that, with food and other ways that you welcome people. But it's because we're celebrating good news, right? That's why we would do this. That's why you'd come to a service on a Thursday night.

[1 : 02] Because there's good news that is worth celebrating and it's worth sharing, isn't it? Both of those things we get the privilege of doing this week. Amen? Let's do that together.

Easter Sunday is coming. Easter Sunday is coming. But in our study in Luke, it's still Friday. From the praises of Palm Sunday that we've been enjoying this morning, now we've come to the crucifixion itself on Friday morning.

Last week we saw Jesus as the forgiving Savior, even as He was nailed to the cross, having mercy on those around Him. He promises eternal life with Him to the dying thief, doesn't He?

And now it's noon. It doesn't look or feel like it here outside Jerusalem. And we're going to hear the rest of the story of the death of Jesus.

Luke chapter 23. We'll pick up the reading at verse 44. This is God's holy Word. It was now about the sixth hour, noon, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed.

[2 : 21] And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. And having said this, He breathed His last.

Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, Certainly this man was innocent. And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.

And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things. Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea.

He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action. And he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of preparation and the Sabbath was beginning.

[3 : 23] The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. Let's pray. Father, very somber words for sure as we hear of the death of our Savior.

Would you have it to be that we would understand not merely what happened, but why and why each and every one of us needs his death and needs to trust the Savior.

Father, speak to us by your Spirit through your Word. We need it. We come sinful and needy and weak and ask that you would speak and that you would heal and that you would give life.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Jesus really died. Jesus really died.

[4 : 37] When we read that a few moments ago. But I just want to acknowledge up front how utterly remarkable that reality is.

Jesus really died. The Lord of life expires. The promised Messiah King who healed others who were dying.

Who walked through crowds prepared to kill Him. Hangs on the cross and breathes His last. The heart of the perfect Son of God that beats with love, beats no more.

I considered stopping this sermon right there and having us ponder that puzzle. We've heard this so many times that perhaps reading over it in one verse is old hat and we think, yeah, sure, that's what happens next.

Can you even wrap your mind around that reality this morning? It's hard, isn't it? It's hard to imagine Jesus really died.

[5 : 51] But Jesus has been telling us all along that His death is absolutely essential. That it's vital that it must happen, right? It's vital to who He is and why He has come.

In fact, Paul tells us that when he starts saying, here are the things that are most important, what do they start with? That Christ Jesus died and that He was buried.

Two things we just read about. What's most important for us to know in all the world are those truths. Luke makes sure that we don't miss either of them. That's a big part of this passage.

That as usual, he is documenting with eyewitnesses. This time a wide range of eyewitnesses. Roman centurions. Jewish women.

Crowds from outside Jerusalem. A Jewish religious leader. Greatly respected. They all see and can affirm what happens here.

[6 : 51] It's important to Luke to establish that Jesus really died. Because Jesus really died. Perhaps that seems normal to us.

But it wouldn't have earned His followers any points, would it? To talk about their leader who had died. Certainly would seem easier to promote a powerful, conquering Messiah.

Because all the people around were looking for one, weren't they? They were longing for that. As I was reminded recently, Islam teaches that part of Jesus' good name and being a great person is that He never actually died.

But rather that Allah brought Jesus to Himself. That's the way to make someone you respect important, right? Unless that's not the way it happened.

Luke wants the historical truth, remember? No matter how hard it is. Luke's eyewitnesses walk with Jesus all week. And all weekend.

[7 : 55] And follow Him every step of the way to the cross. Until His side is pierced. His blood and water pour out. He's taken, wrapped up, buried in a tomb.

Hundreds of these witnesses that are in the city this day will, in coming months, give their lives for the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection.

That's how sure they are of what they saw. They themselves will die for their belief in that truth.

Jesus really dies. Luke wants us to know that.

But he also wants us to see a couple of other occurrences around Jesus' death that show us the significance of it. Why did He die?

Why not another way? What did Jesus' death accomplish? First, notice that Jesus in His death took our judgment.

[9 : 01] We saw last week how Jesus kept speaking of repentance and forgiveness at the cross. But now, here Luke highlights the just penalty that our sin deserves.

Verse 44, it was now about the sixth hour and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour while the sun's light failed.

Noon to three o'clock. Darkness. Not just a cloudy day. The sun's light goes out. That's amazing.

That's what the sun does, isn't it? The sun's light fails. I'm not sure exactly how God worked this out. But it's clear that creation is groaning as Jesus hangs on the cross.

In particular, this darkness is a picture of God's judgment. We could read about it in many prophets. Joel, Zephaniah. But this morning, I want to look briefly at Amos chapter 8 where God is speaking of His judgment on His people.

[10 : 13] On the day of the Lord, His coming judgment. And I'll just read a couple of the verses that describe it. On that day, declares the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.

I'll turn your feasts into mourning. All your songs into lamentation. I'll bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head. I will make it like the mourning for an only son.

And the end of it like a bitter day. A day of mourning. Like mourning for an only son. Interesting that God would cast it in those terms, isn't it?

The darkness that comes. A picture of the judgment of God. Not merely on those who are killing His son. But on sin.

See, it's the sin of God's creatures. Our rebellion against Him in our thoughts, words, attitudes, actions. That incites His just wrath, isn't it?

[11:16] Forgiveness that we've been talking about is needed at the cross because a holy God has been repeatedly and willfully turned against.

People, you and me included, have decided to pursue our own ways. To find life and fulfillment and things and people other than God. And the Bible tells us the wages of that sin is death.

That's what our sin deserves. The wrath and curse of God forever. God tells us Himself He will not and cannot overlook sin and clear guilty people.

He's too righteous. Too good of a judge to declare guilty people innocent, isn't He? He won't do it. So sin must be punished.

And the darkness moves in. You can feel that sin must be punished.

[12:19] This day will not be the only day, but one particular glimpse of God's judgment breaking into human history. See, when God's just judgment on your sin shows up, it's not a small thing.

I've had people say to me things like, yeah, I deserve to lose that job. Or to lose that relationship. Or even to lose that game. Because I really messed up.

God was getting me back. Giving me what I deserved. Friends, do we not see the true awfulness of our sin?

The game? If God was getting you back, making you pay for your sin, it would have been far, far worse than that, yes?

Sin deserves death. When it gets its just reward, that's the only thing. Death and death forever. I want to show you a picture of what happened on that cross that I can still remember my RUF campus minister showing me in college.

[13:37] It seems like a good time of year for eggs, right? Kids, you may be looking forward to some eggs, but this morning, it's not looking so good for the egg.

I've got an egg and a hammer for this illustration. It's not looking great for the egg, is it? But see, the egg represents us.

Okay? And no matter how hard we try and all the good things we do to try to make ourselves look clean and shiny on the outside, we go to church and we do good things, and it's all still an eggshell. That's all we can do on our own because of our sin. Leaves us a little bit fragile, doesn't it? The hammer in this picture represents God's wrath because of our sin, we deserve to be crushed by God.

That's what should happen to our sin, right? We should be crushed by God forever. And in God's wrath comes, His just judgment comes on sin and sinners.

[14:50] And you see what happens when God's just judgment comes on our sin is... Actually, that's not exactly how the story goes, is it?

The one we read this morning, actually in God's story, something else happens, doesn't it? And it's not that the egg gets any better. It's not that the hammer goes away.

But something else steps in. This paint can here will represent Jesus. Jesus comes and on the cross, what does Jesus do?

Jesus steps in, into the place where those cursed sinners are supposed to be. And He stands there on the cross where the sinners were.

And God says that He decided, instead of His wrath coming on our sin, He decided to crush Jesus, right? That the hammer of God's wrath really did come down on Jesus.

[15:59] Nobody's sleeping anymore, is there? That Jesus was crushed in our place. That He took the wrath of God that was meant for us and He protected us.

That we're safe because He covered us and protected us. See, Jesus didn't deserve to die at all, did He? Even the soldier in charge of putting Him on the cross could see that.

Certainly, this man was innocent. Righteous. That's five times now, in case you're counting, in one day that someone has seen this about Jesus.

So if Jesus didn't have any sin, God can't call an innocent person guilty, can He? Just like He can't call a guilty person innocent, God can't call an innocent person guilty.

So if Jesus didn't have any sin, then whose sin is He dying for? When we read of His death on the cross, it has to be sin.

[17 : 15] That's what gets death. He's dying for your sin. My sin. The sin of His people. Did you notice that that day of judgment judgment was supposed to be God's judgment coming on His people?

But it actually, as darkness falls and someone dies, it's actually coming on Jesus. Isn't it?

The hammer of God's wrath falls on Jesus so that everyone who trusts Him, who runs to Him for refuge, no matter how weak His shell is, no matter how dirty her past is, it doesn't really matter if the shell's white or dark or muddy, everyone who runs and finds refuge in Jesus is safe.

If Jesus didn't really die, then this hammer is still coming down on us. But because He did, Jesus took our judgment, which was what?

Guilty. Deserving death. And we get His judgment. Innocent. Life. Forever. Isn't that amazing?

[18 : 39] That He would die, that He would be crushed in your place? He's the only place to run from what you deserve. And instead of getting justice, to get grace never-ending.

If you can imagine it, the second picture Luke gives us makes it even better than that. He also shows us how Jesus in His death welcomed us home.

See, home is where God is. Mankind was created to live with God. That's what makes us at home.

To have this relationship with Him that's so special, but sin messed that up, didn't it?

It didn't merely earn death, although it did that, but it separated us from God. Remember what happened to Adam and Eve in the very first sin? What do they have to do? They've been walking with God in the garden, and now they're sent away.

Out of His presence. Away from Him. Out of the garden. Out of their home with Him. And so when God comes in the Bible to live with His people, sometimes it's in the tabernacle, or then it's in the temple.

[20 : 03] It's not like it used to be. There's not walking and talking with God in the garden. There's a barrier, isn't there, between God and people. In the Jerusalem temple, it's this really thick curtain before the Holy of Holies, the place where God lives.

And it requires many sacrifices to get one man into that place one day a year, and that's all. No one else. But in this dramatic moment of darkness descending on Jerusalem, the Son of God breathing His last breaths, God reaches down, as it were, to that curtain.

Verse 45, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. The curtain that hung there from the top ripped all the way down to the bottom and laid aside.

No longer is God's presence with His people mediated through that curtain and those sacrifices.

No, now through the death of Jesus, God welcomes His people home where they're meant to be.

Do you see in that the restoration of that relationship, of the fellowship, of the creational purpose for which God always intended it, were to live in paradise with Him in His presence?

[21 : 34] I'm not making this up from a little detail in Luke. Hebrews chapter 10 says this, we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain that is through His flesh.

You see His body and His blood mentioned there? What Jesus has done is given us now unlimited access to God, to a holy God for unholy people.

All of God's people now have access into His presence. In fact, even Jesus, who we're told elsewhere, has just called out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As He bears sins on the cross, says, verse 46, Father. The intimacy of the Trinity has been separated as never before.

Why have you forsaken me? And yet, in the darkest moment, even there, the Father is there. And so now, all His children, by faith in Jesus, can come home to their Father anytime, in the deepest darkness of their lives.

[22 : 59] Not through their great efforts, not by bringing enough money to church with them, not through their great sacrifices, but through the single sacrifice of Jesus, we come home.

See, Jesus doesn't just protect us from God's wrath and then leave us living life fragile and alone and isolated and with no more protection.

No. He dies to welcome us into God's family, to bring us home to our Father so that we always live in His presence even now.

There's a door in this hallway beside the sanctuary that says private on it. I want to tell you a secret about that. Most of you have never been through that door.

On the other side of that door is the pastor's study. It's where on many mornings, especially Thursday mornings, I'm studying and writing sermons and no one else can come in.

[24 : 12] The staff jokes that they're not allowed into the inner sanctum then. The doors are closed. No one gets in. Okay? But last year, almost every Thursday morning around 9.30 as the ladies were gathering in their small groups for Bible study and I was sitting in my chair, I would hear some little feet running down the hallway towards that door and I would jump up out of my sermon writing chair and I would run over to the door and my five-year-old daughter, Lily, would come running in and jump up into my arms and give me a big hug.

It's a great way to start your Thursday. I was always glad to take a break for that. I'm going to ask you a question I think you'll know the answer to. Why for her, when even the other pastors were locked out?

Why for her? Because she's my child, right? She has access. Anytime she wants, she can run into my arms and be at home.

That's what Jesus is making us on the cross. Children who can run into the arms of their father.

See, many people see in this passage a great example of how to die.

Running into the arms of our father at death. And that's certainly here. Jesus, in his final hours, thinks of others. Quotes Scripture.

[25 : 49] Trusts God's strength. Follows God's plan. And even in his last breath, entrusts himself to his father's faithful care. Care.

It's a great, great picture for us of how to die. Pastor Jimmy Agan says, even at the moment of death, Jesus would rather entrust himself to his father's steadfast love than attempt to deliver himself.

It's good stuff. I need to start living that way now. And it is true that the death of Jesus changes death for us. Colin Smith writes, Christ's death changes death for all his people.

When you die, you will not carry your sin and guilt into your death because he carried it into his death for you. If you are in Christ, you will never know what it is like to die a sin-bearing death. Amen? Yes. Yes. As we consider facing death one day, the confidence and humility and trust of Jesus can be ours because we learn from him and because he bore our sins and took our punishment.

[27 : 08] That's good news. But y'all, Jesus didn't die primarily to give us an example of how to die. but rather to give us an empowerment for how to live right now today where he has placed us.

He died to tear the curtain so that we could run home into the arms of our heavenly father now.

Yeah, a lot of times we live like that curtain is still there, don't we?

I only really talk to God on Sunday. Only the pastor can really pray especially about important things. I better not try something big and tough for God, something risky.

I don't want to risk failing. He might turn his back on me. You know, when I'm struggling with sin, I better keep my distance from God for a while.

No, no, no, no, because of Jesus, the relationship with God is yours now. Not just one day, someday in heaven.

[28 : 21] Let me finish the Hebrews passage where he tells us how to live because of the torn curtain. Since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is through his flesh, since we have a great priest over the house of God, all of those things we have now.

let us now draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Brothers and sisters, let us draw near often.

Let us hold fast always because he is faithful. You're his child.

He is your father who loves you and you can run into his arms anytime now. Lily runs into my office partly because as a child, her eye line, her line of sight is too low to read the word private on the door.

[29 : 40] She hasn't noticed it yet. If she ever grows up and becomes an adult who's taller, who can read that sign and stops coming into my office, I'll tear that sign down.

I assure you I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. I will. Have you grown up too much to remember you're his child? And your father has sent his son so that you can live with him and come to him anytime in any situation.

He loves you so much that he tears the curtain down so you can be with him. Colin Smith again. When our sin reached its full horror, at the worst possible moment, God's love was displayed in all its glory.

If you doubt God's love for you, look at the cross. No other love can match this. Nothing else in our experience can come close. God's love for us in Christ is greater than we ever dared dream.

[30 : 54] the love of God in Christ is a beautiful thing to remember as we prepare to come to this table. Notice in verse 46, Luke tells us, Jesus called out with a loud voice his final words, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

Shockingly, with almost no air left in his lungs on the cross, Jesus calls out in a loud voice, y'all, that doesn't happen.

You've never been to a crucifixion, that's not how it ends. Jesus calls out in a loud voice and actively entrusts his spirit to his Father.

Why is Luke highlighting this? I think it's because Jesus is showing us that no one takes his life from him. He lays it down of his own accord as he told us.

Maybe this is part of what made the centurion believe he was the innocent son of God. He was close enough to see the incredible love that sent Jesus to the cross purposefully.

[32 : 14] He knew where he was going and he went there to take the judgment for your sins and to welcome you home to your Father and to a table like this one where the Father eats with you.

Knowing that that cross was coming, Jesus just 24 hours earlier sat with his disciples and he took bread and he broke it and gave it to him and said, take, eat, this is my body broken for you, do this in remembrance of me.

And then he took the cup and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Shed for many for the forgiveness of sins, drink from it, all of you.

He wasn't confused about where he was headed. and he went there for you and for me because of his great love for you. Let's pray. Jesus, my sins are enough for you to have needed to die for me to know my Father.

Our sins are greater than we can count and we thank you. Not just for words, but for your body and blood given to us that we can touch and smell and taste this morning and remember your love and rejoice in it.

[33 : 56] Would these strengthen our faith? They're common elements, but Father, you use them for holy purposes in our hearts and you're here meeting with us by your spirit. We give you praise and thanks in Jesus' name.

Amen. This table is not Southwood's table or the Presbyterian church's. It's the Lord's table. And He invites all of us who have come home to the Father through the death of Jesus in our place, who have baptized Christians from any church that preaches salvation through Christ alone to come and celebrate with us.

Listen, if you don't trust Jesus to be the solution to your problem with sin, then don't come and partake of these elements this morning.

Don't come and say outwardly something that you don't believe to be true inwardly. We wouldn't ask you to do that at all. Please know you're welcome to come as we do to these tables and just say, will you pray with me?

We'd love to do that. But rather than coming to a table and taking bread and juice, we'd love to talk with you about Jesus himself and how he is the one, the only one, who can deal with our sin, yours and ours.

[35 : 21] Listen, if you do trust him, if he's your savior, draw near to God this morning through this bread and juice, come through the body and blood of Jesus and don't just take bread and juice, but meet with God.

Draw near to him, hold fast to him, encourage your brothers and sisters to trust him. That's why we come. We come because Jesus has died for our sins so that we can come and run into the arms of our father this morning and know him and trust him and love him more.

Our host team will usher you to tables forward, and back as we celebrate together and draw our strength from his grace. Let's do that now. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. Thank you. Thank you.