

Matthew 27:32-50 - The Pain of the Cross

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Our consideration of the Easter story has led us here now to the cross. After betrayal, misjudgment, and false accusations, we will now see Jesus beaten, suffer, and come to the end of His life.
- Listen now as I read to us this most tragic parts of the Easter story, the death of our Savior, from Matthew chapter 27. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name.
- They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall.
- But when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there.
- [1 : 1 0] And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. Then two robbers were crucified with him. One on the right and one on the left.
- And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.
- So also the chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked him, saying, He saved others. He cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him.
- He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now if he desires him. For he said, I am the Son of God. And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.
- Now from the sixth hour, there was darkness all over the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?
- [2 : 1 8] That is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders hearing it said, this man is calling Elijah. And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.
- But the other said, wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded his spirit.
- Will you pray with me? Father, this is the tragic story. The tragic story of the death of your Son.
- As we consider it now, would you begin even in these seconds to soften and break our hearts. To help us to see the tragedy, the tragedy of our sin and our lives.
- To help us see the love and the care, the patience, the endurance that Jesus showed for us, your people. Father, would you speak through me?
- [3 : 2 9] Would you speak despite me now? Pray these things in your heavenly Son's name. Amen. Our world, our life, our culture are filled with expressions of love.

We see them played out on stages. We see them played out on films and song and poetry and acts of kindness and acts of service. The most compelling, most enduring expressions of love occur between two people who are often struggling, questioning, doubting the degree that each has for the other.

Star-crossed lovers, unrequited love fit this bill. There's been many movies and songs that have penned things about these kinds of relationships.

Romeo and Juliet, sleepless in Seattle, the Roman holiday are great examples of love being played out on stage and on screen. We find especially poignant expressions of love in romantic love.

Romantic love is that love that goes beyond normal convention or reason when one person wants to express their love for the other. These expressions often answer the doubting heart of the lover.

[4 : 46] How much do you love me? How deeply do you care for me? A woman may ask her husband or a husband may ask his wife. The response normally describes what one would do for the other.

The great links, the great distances, the great challenges that one would cover for the other. One of the more popular love songs that sounds like this is Make You Feel My Love by Bob Dylan.

Listen to a few of the words from this song. When the evening shadows and the stars appear and there is no one there to dry your tears, I could hold you for a million years to make you feel my love.

I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue, I'd go crawling down the avenue. No, there's nothing I wouldn't do to make you feel my love. I could make you happy, make your dreams come true.

There's nothing I would not do. Go to the ends of the earth for you to make you feel my love. Bob Dylan's song answers this question of how much do you love me?

[5 : 54] It answers this question by telling us of all the things that the other would do in love and in care and in devotion, the sacrifices that one would make for the other. Bob Dylan's expressing his willingness to sacrifice and to give.

As we celebrate the cross tonight and this weekend, God answers that same question for us. He answers this question to a world that's desperate for love, that's desperate for someone who is faithful, faithful in relationship, faithful in care, faithful in devotion.

And God responds by giving us his son. And his son goes to the cross and sings a love song. A love song which displays his love to his people.

A love song which declares to the world how much he cherishes his bride. But this song is not the kind of song that we're used to. It's not a song that carries a pleasing melody.

It's not one that strikes you with soft or poignant reminders. This song, this cross, is a declaration of great pain.

[7 : 06] It's not soft or palatable, but it's harsh and it's difficult to receive. Blood is prevalent on the cross.

Tears are plentiful. Cries of anguish and hurt abound on the cross. The pain of the cross, this passage tells us, shows up in two ways.

The first is through the pain of Jesus' physical suffering. Our passage contains just one simple reference to the crucifixion of Jesus, but our hearts should pause there.

We ought to consider what it was that Jesus faced, what his physical body faced on our behalf. Jesus was struck with a whip, a whip that was made with bits of metal and glass attached to the end.

He was repeatedly struck until there was little flesh left on his back. The crown of thorns with its naturally sharpened edges was pressed hard upon the head of Jesus until blood began to drip into his nose, into his eyes, into his mouth.

[8 : 19] Jesus' clothes were removed. They were divided and taken by some of the people who were gathered there. He was placed upon the cross. Nails were driven through his hands and into his feet.

His suffering and his pain quickly reached extreme levels. Those who were crucified died either by shock from the pain or eventually by way of suffocation, by not being able to hold one's weight up on the cross.

And it was there, high up on the hill, raised up for the whole city to see, Jesus enduring physical, intense pain.

We additionally have details in our passage about the mockery and the shaming that Jesus received. This is the emotional suffering that Jesus faced on our behalf.

There, on the cross, paying the penalty for sins that he did not commit, Jesus was defiled with words. After a divine, miracle-working, compassion-marked, mercy-filled ministry, the Savior of the world is being mocked and shamed.

[9 : 35] He's been betrayed by his friends, ridiculed by the Jews, and shamed by the public. Jesus is declared merely mortal now before the people.

Onlookers, the chief priests and scribes, and even the robbers that hung beside him, wagged their heads, shook their fingers, and defiled him with words of dishonor and ridicule.

The final words that Jesus heard about himself surely caused him to be filled with great sorrow and anguish. He cannot save himself, they cried.

And it was there, in the midst of that physical pain, in the midst of that emotional suffering, that Jesus breathed his last breath, and he faced that great pain of being separated from his Father.

In his final breath, and in his final cry, Jesus felt the presence of his Father no more. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[10 : 44] My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? This is not unlike the separation anxiety that many of our children experienced when they were young.

Unable to grasp the reality of their parents' continued love and presence, small babies cry out for their mother and father when they leave them. Afraid of the pain of separation, they expressed their deep anguish and sorrow through their cries.

Jesus, on the cross, expressed a separation anxiety that knew no match, a separation anxiety that spanned all emotional capacity, that spanned all time and all spiritual presence.

Now, taking the sin of the entire world upon himself, Jesus was left alone to suffer, left alone to face the punishment for the sins that he did not commit.

The accounts that we have read tonight tell us that there are a number of people who contributed to or are responsible for Jesus' death.

[11 : 54] The disciples deserted him. The disciples deserted him. Judas betrayed him. The chief priest and the Sanhedrin accused him. Pilate ultimately delivered him. Pilate. However, make no mistake.

It was your sin. It was my sin. It was the sin of the world which puts Jesus on the cross. These men, these people were the ones through whom Jesus was punished, but it was our sin, our transgressions, our evil acts, and the heart which produces them all that place Jesus on the cross. Jesus faced extreme pain because your sin was extreme. His punishment was awful because your sin was awful. His suffering was deplorable because your sin was deplorable. Jesus paid the penalty that was required for your sin. The pain of the cross was powerful and strong because your sin is powerful and strong.

But the glory and the beauty of the cross is found in this. The degree to which Jesus suffered, the degree to which you faced agony, torment, and pain was the degree to which you are loved, you are forgiven and you are redeemed. When you reflect upon the cross, remember your sin and remember the depth of payment and the degree of love which was required to set your heart free.

And just as you reflect that your sin sent Jesus there, remember that it was the love of God that held Him there. Your sin sent Jesus to the cross, but it was the love of the Father that kept Him there. So the cross is ultimately God's love song to His people. Listen to it from the poetic words of Isaiah in chapter 53. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to His own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is before its shearers is silent.

So He opened not His mouth. And they made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him. He has put grief on Him. The song of the cross was the Father's expression of how much He loved His people, and the great lengths that He would go to to save and redeem them.

[15 : 09] He was willing to leave His Son, to abandon Him on a cross to die. He allowed Jesus to receive punishment for us, to pay the penalty for our sins. The cross is a song, an expression of the heights, the depths, the greatness of God's love. The song of Good Friday, the song of the cross, however, is a dirge, a funeral song, a mournful song, because today our Savior died. There is a new song coming, but today we mourn. Today we consider the pain of the cross, the sin which placed Him there, and the great love that He had for us, His people. Today we mourn the one whose pain was required to save and redeem us. Will you pray with me? Father, it is hard for us to imagine that it had to go like this. Did someone have to die for us? Couldn't we have saved ourselves?

The atonement of Your Son, the life of Your Son tells us otherwise. We know that there is no one fit to fulfill Your law, no one who can perfectly pay for our sins other than Your Son, Your very being taking on flesh on earth. So, Father, thank You for that good news. Thank You for the expression of love that we find in the cross. Father, would You help our hearts to mourn, though, to mourn as we understand the greatness, the gravity of our sin. And Father, as we do that, might we understand in greater and more profound ways the love that You have for us. It is in Your Son's name that we pray. Amen.

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