

Forsaken by God

Matthew 27:45-50

Much like I introduced the sermon last Sunday afternoon, today's sermon will focus upon the promise and hope of the gospel. And with good reason, for we come in Matthew's gospel to Jesus' actual death upon the cross, his physical death that brought about an end to the human life he had previously lived in the flesh. Also as I said last week, we are far better off with these words that describe and define his suffering and death than if God had given us a visual account, a movie. The benefit for us of words is that words have meaning, objective meaning. And God gives us that meaning, he defines it. In that context, the harm and danger of a visual presentation of Jesus' death is that, because we are so heavily influenced by what we see, our understanding of that what we see is left to our own interpretation and impression. And emotions. So a visual depiction of Jesus' death, especially if it was done accurately, would evoke all sorts of deeply felt emotions with regard to grief. And that visual picture would become dominant, our subjective response to that visual depiction would dominate everything else.

The point is, while this event was a horrific and gruesome occasion of unspeakable and unconscionable evil, the importance of what happened does not lie in a visual impression burned into our mind and consciousness. The importance of what happened, instead, lies in the meaning of it all, a meaning so well revealed by God and expressed with the words of the gospel writers.

I should note as well, that this meaning I am referring to is nothing else than the Christian gospel. The meaning of what took place upon that cross is nothing less than the very central meaning of Christianity and the Christian religion. Christianity is not simply a philosophical system that gives some sort of

meaning to life. It is not merely an ethical or moral system about how we ought to live out our lives. And neither is it some sort of emotional or subjective experience that we use to define our own existence. Christianity is not defined by your experience or mine—rather, it is defined objectively by what Jesus did for us. And so, the earliest testimony of faith so often heard from our young children is very simple, “Jesus died for my sins.”

There is such straightforward declaration of truth in that statement. There is such theological precision in that statement, and such religious vitality. What does it mean to profess your faith? It means to proclaim the Lord's death, as we read in the introduction of the Apostle Paul to the Lord's Supper.

1 Cor. 11:26 “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.”

So that testimony of a young child is absolutely genuine, it is the testimony you should preserve all of your life, you who are Christians, true believers. “Jesus died for my sins.” That testimony is what Paul expresses to define the whole of the gospel in,

1 Cor. 15:1. “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

That is the gospel I preach to you this afternoon, the gospel I preach every time I enter this pulpit. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” That's what my ministry is all about. That's what the ministry of the church is all about, preaching that

gospel, that message of good news. And this afternoon, we come to the account of that historical event as Matthew recorded it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus died on the cross, and he did so in order to accomplish all that had to be done so that you and I who believe in him might have eternal life.

Let me start, then, by expressing what Jesus had to do. What did he do, so that you and I could be saved? The simple, straightforward answer to that question is that he had to be condemned. By God the father. The wages of sin is death. The curse of the covenant between God and men is explicit, spoken as a warning and threat to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Gen. 2:16 “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

The condemnation of death was the punishment God inflicted upon sin, demanded by his justice and righteousness. Condemnation. And Jesus had to experience that condemnation himself, in his human flesh, in order to be our substitute. He was condemned, in his innocence, so that we ourselves could be freed from that condemnation. That’s Christianity. That’s the gospel. If you know the precious theological and biblical word, that is propitiation. The judgment of condemnation was received by Jesus to satisfy the demands of God’s justice, so that we could be freed from that condemnation. In the words of,

Rom. 3:22 “For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

And then in,

Rom. 5:8 “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. 11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Paul continues,

Rom. 5:16 “And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. 17 For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) 18 Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”

Beloved, I hope those familiar words thrill your soul, because they thrill mine to proclaim them to you. And all of that brings us to the historical occasion recorded in Matthew 27. Jesus is...

I. FORSAKEN AND CONDEMNED.

And with words, inspired words from God, we observe,

A. The utter agony of condemnation.

v.46

He is quoting Psalm 22, and I believe it is likely he quoted the whole Psalm as he hung upon the cross. We have several verses specifically mentioned in the various gospel accounts. But here is the focal point, the main idea.

Ps. 22:1 “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning? 2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent.”

That Psalm continues, to include these words,

Ps. 22:6 “But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. 7 All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8 “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”

Ps. 22:12 “Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. 13 They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. 15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. 16 For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; 17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. 18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.”

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” That is the utter agony of condemnation.

2 Cor. 5:21 “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.”

Jesus became sin. That is, he was punished as a sin. He

was condemned in our place.

Is. 53:5 “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

That’s Christianity. That’s true religion, the only true religion there is. That’s the gospel. Jesus died for our sins, condemned in our place. And Matthew records the supernatural evidence of that by describing those three hours of darkness.

v.45

Why darkness? It was so clearly,

B. The cosmic evidence of condemnation.

When God the Father, the eternal creator of heaven and earth, condemned his son, the whole of God’s creation endured the evidence of that condemnation—the sun itself was darkened. The light of this world was darkened, for three hours. And it was during the duration of those three hours when Jesus suffered this agony of condemnation.

Luke’s gospel tells us that “the sun was darkened.” You could use the English word eclipse there, though not in a technical, astronomical sense, as if the sun and moon actually aligned at that moment. This was a supernatural event, a supernatural intervention of God in the life and history of his creation. The ESV simply puts it, “the sun’s light failed.” God darkened the sun as the outward evidence of his act of condemnation inflicted upon his own beloved son. One commentator expresses it this way, “The darkness meant judgment, the judgment of God upon our sins. his wrath as it were burning itself out in the very heart of Jesus, so that he, as our Substitute, suffered most intense agony,

indescribable woe, terrible isolation or forsakenness. Hell came to Calvary that day, and the Savior descended into it and bore its horrors in our stead.”

Darkness is a consistent biblical description of judgment, never more clear than in the sixth seal of,

Rev. 6:12 “I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. 13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. 14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. 15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, 16 and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Jesus died for our sins. But to continue in Matthew’s gospel, we also see,

II. THE FULLNESS OF HUMANITY.

Jesus’ humanity.

v.48

There we come back to Jesus’ human suffering, and his thirst. There are seven recorded statements by Jesus upon the cross, and the fifth of those is very simply, “I thirst.” John 19:28 And now, with the condemnation of being forsaken by his father ended, at the conclusion of those three hours of darkness, Jesus takes the drink designed to alleviate his thirst. No doubt one of the soldiers present filled a sponge with some sort of cheap wine

and put it on a stick to offer it to Jesus. He was, of course, thirsty. His body suffocating from the cruel torture of the crucifixion. And so we note his,

A. Human need and thirst.

This, too, is a specific fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Ps. 69:19 “You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor; My adversaries are all before You. 20 Reproach has broken my heart, And I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; And for comforters, but I found none. 21 They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

The point is simple and straightforward. Jesus died as a man, fully human, demonstrated by this example of human suffering. And he was again mocked.

v.49

To the very end, there continues this,

B. Human rejection and mockery.

We looked at that quite extensively last Sunday. And those words from Psalm 22 are familiar,

Ps. 22:6 “But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. 7 All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8 “He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”

There is yet one final step of Jesus’ human experience which we so rightly describe as his estate of humiliation.

III. HUMAN DEATH.

v.50

Do you know what he said at this point, his sixth statement from the cross? Matthew just says that he “cried out again with a loud voice.” The loud voice would demonstrate the significance of what he said, and John’s gospel tells us what it was.

John 19:30 “So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.”

It is finished! We see,

A. The work of redemption accomplished.

The suffering and agony of condemnation is finished. The propitiation for our sins is finished. Completed. Accomplished. Everything that had to be done was done. The demands and requirements of God’s wrath and justice were fully and completely satisfied. His suffering is therefore finished.

And I mean finished in the sense of absolute completion, once for all. Remember, all of those Old Testament sacrifices had to be repeated, year and year. But Jesus sacrifice of his own body was finished once and for all. And so we read,

Heb. 7:26 “For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

The substitutionary work of Christ was finished, made perfect and complete forever.

Heb. 9:1 “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats

and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

Once for all. That is what is so significant about this. Nothing else has to be done, nothing else could possibly be done. Jesus did it all. Jesus paid it all. And, therefore, the promise of Romans 8 comes into perfect view.

Rom. 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

He continues that idea,

Rom. 8:2 “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

God condemned sin in the human flesh of his own beloved son. And that condemnation is finished. It is completed. It is over. The work of redemption of accomplished. And then we see,

B. The power of death defeated.

Jesus’ last words upon the cross, the seventh saying, spoken as he died. Matthew just records this,
v.50

This time it is Luke’s gospel that gives us the specific words, Luke 23:46 “And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ ” Having said this, He breathed His last.”

A few important thoughts about those words. First, human death is clearly defined by the separation of the body and the soul. There are, I believe, two basic components to our human nature, one physical and the other non-physical. There is, of course, the body, which at death, becomes a corpse. Just as God had defined in that initial curse pronounced upon Adam the man,

Gen. 2:19 “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”

The other component of our humanity has several different words to identify it, including most often either the soul, the spirit, or even the heart. And so, the biblical definition of death is the separation of the body and the soul, the separation of the physical part from the non-physical. And what happened to the non-physical part, for Jesus, is clearly explained. His spirit, his soul, his human soul, went to be with his Father in heaven.

And I should emphasize, Jesus died upon his own will and determination. He wasn't killed, to be technically accurate. Rather, he laid down his life himself. “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ ” Having said this, He breathed His last.”

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep...14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep...17 “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

With that power to lay down his own human life, to entrust his

human soul to his father in heaven, Jesus triumphs over death itself. That triumph, will, of course, be declared so definitively with his resurrection. But even here, even in this description of his death, that triumph is evident. Upon the cross, when the three hours of darkness were over, when the work of redemption was finished, Jesus laid down his life and died. “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ ” Having said this, He breathed His last.”

Let me end with two very specific encouragements and applications to all of this. First, embrace the confidence that those words offer to you, that God the Father condemned sin, your sin, in the flesh, Jesus' flesh, such that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”

2 Cor. 5:21 “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

And then, second, may the understanding of all of that stir up your own heart in love and gratitude for what Jesus has done for you, you who trust and believe in him. I don't want to stir up the human horror of what a merely visual image might well create in your mind, but I do want to stir up a very real awareness of what Jesus suffered and endured, for your sake, that your sins might be forgiven. It was he who cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”