

Good Friday - The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus – John 19:17-37

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, “They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”^[b] So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman,^[c] here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so

that you also may believe.³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,”^[d]³⁷ and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.”^[e]

“LOOKING UPON THE CRUCIFIED ONE”

John 19:37 And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

Roman Catholics display the crucifix in their churches, the cross with the figure of the crucified Christ on it. Protestants display the empty cross which signifies that Christ is risen and alive. Both are necessary. The death of Christ as well as his resurrection victory are central to our faith. A truly universal Christianity would display the crucifix and the empty cross side by side. Easter Sunday is the day for the empty cross. But on Good Friday all Christians do this, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.” And we Protestants must admit that there is great comfort and magnetic power in the crucifix. In John 12:32,33, Jesus said, “‘And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to indicate the kind of death he would die.”

In John 19 we read that Jesus cried, “‘It is finished,’ bowed his head and gave up his spirit.’ Jewish leaders asked Pilate to have the crucified men removed before the Sabbath. Pilate agreed, and his soldiers went and broke their legs. That would cause them to die quickly. But they saw that Jesus was already dead. So instead of breaking his legs one soldier pierced his side with a spear. Blood and water came forth, indicating that Jesus was certainly dead. In 19:36,37 John writes, ‘So scripture was fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken,” as well as another, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”’

That’s what we will do today. “We will look on the one whom we have pierced.” I change “they” to “we”, for we are the ones looking upon the crucified. And also because the sins which put Jesus on the cross are in you and in me and in all of us, just as they were in Pilate and Caiaphas and the crowd and the soldiers and the disciples. What do we see as we look upon the one whom we have pierced?

First, we see the greatest act of love ever.

This was the greatest act of love ever for several reasons. First, because it was God’s act of love. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God not only gave us Christ; he gave him to die for our sake. “God is love” says the Bible. How do we know that? It’s because God allowed his Son to die for us, to accomplish something we

desperately need, but cannot accomplish ourselves. On the Cross, God himself in human flesh died for us. Our God is a Crucified God. What kind of God allows himself to be humiliated and crucified? Only a God who loves us more than we can possibly imagine.

Secondly, this was the greatest act of love ever because it was for all people. Our imperfect love extends to a few people. But God's perfect act of love in the crucified One was for everyone. No one is more inclusive than God. All people, past, present and future, fall under the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..." Replace "world" with your own name. Put your own name in there for it brings home the personal nature of God's love. God's act of love in Jesus Christ was for all and it was for you.

Here's reason # 3. Jesus' death was the greatest act of love ever because it was for the undeserving. Jesus' death was not for people who had repented and straightened themselves out. Quite the opposite. Paul writes that, "God shows his love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Sin and rebellion spoiled our relationship with God and put us on the road to perishing. But God did not abandon us. Instead, he came after us in Christ in order to bring us home. "Christ died for our sins," says the Bible. This great love for the undeserving is called "grace." And it is not cheap. It cost God his dearest and best.

"They will look upon the one they have pierced." When we look on the one who we have crucified we see the greatest act of love ever.

Secondly, we see our Saviour.

From the cross God says to us, "My Son suffers and dies in your place, paying the price for your sin, because my love for you is so great." Peter tells us, "You were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ." Through faith in Christ the Saviour we are brought into acceptance before God, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. Through faith in Christ the Saviour we become children of God forever. We shall not perish but have eternal life. "What shall I do to be saved?" The Bible's answer is clear, "Receive...and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

There is one specific aspect of salvation I want to mention. Both Matthew and Mark record that at about three o'clock on that strangely dark afternoon Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Of all the words Jesus spoke from the cross, these are the deepest and most mysterious.

Certainly Jesus felt forsaken as he died on the cross. That was bad enough. But it was more than a feeling. He had been abandoned by friend and foe alike. And now his Father had forsaken him, too. No one was ever more alone than Jesus was on the cross. The Bible

says that God made him to become sin who knew no sin. And Holy God simply cannot bear to look upon sin. So the Father had to turn away and let his beloved Son die as the final sacrifice for our sin. The innocent one for the guilty. There was a separation which was just as terrible for the Father as it was for the Son.

But this was for us. Jesus was forsaken by God for a brief time so that we will never be. All that would cause Holy God to justifiably turn away from us, our sin, our rebellion, our foolishness, all of it was dealt with by Jesus' death. And though we might sometimes feel forsaken by God, we never are. Maybe in the midst of this COVID 19 disaster we feel that God has forsaken us. One person said to me recently that in a time of distress she felt that God had forsaken her. She later realized that it was not so. The truth is that we never are forsaken by God. Because Jesus was forsaken for a time, there is no longer any God-forsaken place in your life. Even when we turn from God, God does not forsake us. Indeed, there is never any God-forsaken place in this world. God has not forsaken the places where COVID-19 is so rampant. God is at work in those places in ways that only partially see right now. But God's promise is sure, "I will never fail you or forsake you." Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is salvation. And it comes through faith in Christ the Saviour.

"They will look upon the one whom they have pierced." Finally, when we look upon the one whom we have pierced we see we see true life.

That's strange isn't it – to look at a dying man and to see life. But Jesus' death shows us that dying to self, and giving oneself for the sake of others is the way to truly live. Life, according to God's plan, comes not through what we get, but through what we give; not through self-assertion, but through self-sacrifice. Jesus said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, will save it. For what does it profit someone to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?" Jesus taught and showed that the way to true life is through useful, sacrificial service to God and to others. The brave front-line medical personnel are the true heroes in this Covid-19 pandemic. They are acting in a truly Christ-like way, putting themselves at risk to save the sick and to comfort the dying. How grateful we are for them all. May God protect and strengthen them.

On Sunday we will survey the empty cross and celebrate the resurrection. But today we cast our eyes on the Son of God dying for us, in love. "They shall look upon the one whom they have pierced." Today may our hearts be moved to repentance and faith. May we take ourselves off the throne and enthrone Christ instead. May we take up our cross and follow where he leads us. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me."