

Matthew 27:27-56

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[0 : 00] Amen. So I want us to get straight into it to see the sights and hear the sounds of the cross.

! We see the abuse of the Gentiles, the Roman soldiers in verses 27 to 36.! And you don't expect more from them in many ways.

But there's also the abuse from Israel. That is the tragedy, I think, of this abuse. In verses 39 to 44, it comes from places out of mouths that you would hope would know better or would see differently. That is the leaders of Israel, the chief priests and the senior pastors, the theologians and the lay leaders, the elders. And even the passers-by hurl abuse at Jesus.

And surely the descendants of the covenant people of God, if anyone, would know and recognize that Jesus, who he is. But they don't. In fact, the Jews at this time, by and large, could see nothing in a suffering saviour.

[1 : 19] For them, the proof that Jesus was not the Messiah was the fact that he was being nailed to the cross. No one could be suffering like that and yet still be the Messiah.

It was completely incongruous to them. They couldn't believe in a suffering Messiah. It's a little bit like putting water on cornflakes. You'd never do that, would you?

You put milk on cornflakes. You might put yoghurt on your cornflakes if you're odd. Some people put sugar on their cornflakes.

Other people might like to eat them dry a handful out of the box. But you never hear of someone. You'd never hear of someone putting water on cornflakes. You don't hear that, do you? And if you are the Messiah, in the Jewish mind, you don't suffer.

You just don't suffer like that. It's a contradiction in terms. What a tragedy. What blindness. The professing people of God, Israel's leaders, didn't see it.

[2 : 26] And in all of your religion, you will never see Jesus rightly until God opens your eyes to see that it is right. But there's also truth in this abuse.

I don't know whether you noticed that. Look at verse 42. And this is part of the tragedy. They didn't speak to Jesus. They spoke about him. It's as if he was absent.

And they talked about him to one another. And they said he saved others. He cannot save himself. And even in the abuse that they throw at him, they speak the truth about him.

It's interesting that the kind of mouth that God can use to be proclaimers of truth. They were right, weren't they? He saved others.

He cannot save himself. And if he is going to be the savior of others, of us, he cannot save himself. And if he's going to be the savior, he dare not save himself.

[3 : 27] But there's also temptation in the abuse. You see that in verse 43. When they said, I wonder if they were conscious of the fact that they're actually taking up the words of Psalm 22. They said, he put his confidence in God.

Let God deliver him now if he wants. And that must have been like a knife through Jesus' stomach. Let him deliver him if he wants.

There's no more subtle temptation than that. And it's one that we, the people of God, know that. It's the temptation of David in Psalm 3 in verse 2.

He's running away from Absalom who's revolted and rebelled against him. And David is recounting his experience to God in prayer. And he says, they are saying about me.

Many are saying about me. There is no help for him in God. What do they mean? Do they mean that God is not able to help him? No, that's not what they meant.

[4 : 28] They meant there's no help for him in God. That is, God won't help a character like him. He doesn't deserve it.

There's nothing more subtle, nothing more grievous than when that temptation grips you. You might even bring it up to yourself. God is not going to deliver me from the situation I am in.

I don't deserve it. And you know, don't you, the problem with that kind of temptation is there's an element of truth in it, isn't there? It's usually true.

It's not, I don't deserve the least of God's mercies. Even as a believer, I don't deserve them. And so if I want to be strict about it, when this temptation comes to me, I have to agree that it's true.

Why should God want me? Why should God give me any deliverance? And that is part of believing experience.

[5 : 33] And you may begin to whisper to yourself, God wants no part with the likes of me, with someone like me. And it's at this point, I think, that it's very helpful to remember and to remind ourselves that our Savior faced that same temptation.

Let God deliver him if he wants him. He really was tempted in every respect, just as we are. But if you keep your ears and eyes open at the cross, you secondly see the anguish of the cross, the abuse of the cross, and then the anguish of the cross.

And you see that especially in verse 46. And these are words that we cannot fully understand. But in verses 45 to 49, and especially verse 46, you see the anguish.

You hear Jesus cry, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And the one thing that we must not do is we must not tone that down.

We mustn't say Jesus didn't really know what he was talking about. And he just felt forsaken of God. That's not what he said. You need to take Jesus soberly here.

[6 : 54] When he expresses his anguish. Do you see the two responses? There's two reactions. There's the reaction of heaven, isn't there? Because there was darkness for those three hours.

You might say it's almost as if there is something of the sympathy of heaven. Yes, there was darkness in the plague before the judgment on the sun.

Of course it's speaking of that. But I think there's more than that. There is the sympathy of heaven with the sufferer on earth in his anguish and in his abandonment.

In some way, some mysterious way, the father, as his son is going through all this, it is like heaven sympathizes with his suffering.

And causes darkness to blacken over the earth. And you have the opposite reaction in verses 47 to 49. Look there. Where it says, There's a deliberate twist there.

[8 : 15] I think there's deliberate contempt. Maybe he's calling Elijah, they say. Let's give him a little something to perk him up. And see if we can get a little bit more life out of him.

And then others say, Well, let's stand back. Let's see if Elijah comes and rescues him. It's mere mockery. Some people can look, can't they, on the most sacred things and desecrate them.

What do you make of this anguish? Verse 46. We can't plumb the depths of it. But it seems as if it is saying, isn't it, that because Jesus is bearing the sins of his people, that Jesus is enduring the just judgment of God that our sin deserved, because he took his people's sins on himself, in that judgment, God, in some mysterious way, Jesus experiences what it is to be forsaken by the love of his Father.

Oh, what a depth there is. God forsaken by God. Who can understand it, Martin Luther said. But it is for real. Verse 46.

You know this, don't you? That every time that Jesus refers to God in Matthew, Mark, and Luke in the Synoptic Gospels, he refers to God as Father. My Father. Our Father in Heaven.

[9 : 41] This is the only time he doesn't. Isn't that significant? It's significant because a change in terminology matters.

Let's think of a child who's been fostered in a family and then is adopted, and they've known the adults in that home by their first names all the way through the process.

They've been placed in that family and they've known the adults in that home by their first names. But there comes a moment, doesn't there? There comes a moment when for the first time that child calls those adults mum or dad.

And relational terms matter. And Jesus doesn't call God Father here because in some sense, some mysterious way, he is cut off from that intimate fellowship with his Father as he bears his people's sin.

And yet, though there's a degree of suffering that Jesus went through, and I know that our sufferings and our anguish, they will never ever compare with what Jesus went through on the

cross.

[11:00] Yet, nevertheless, I want to say there's great help for you and I here today. You see, can you notice that even in the midst of the cross, Jesus clings to an unchanging fact?

Can you just notice with me how he addresses God? He calls him my God. My God, why have you forsaken me?

Even in his forsakenness, he still calls God my God. My God, when God's son is in the pit, he still senses, doesn't he, that in some way God still holds him.

He is still his God. He can still say, my God. My God. And if you are a child of God this morning, if you are part of his people, you will never be forsaken in the way that Jesus was forsaken.

Because Jesus was forsaken so that you might never be forsaken by God. God forsook his son so that he would not have to forsake his people.

[12:18] But you and I, if you've been Christian for any length of time, you will know that there are very dark times in the Christian life, aren't there? There are difficult times.

There are times of darkness when the light of God's presence seems to be withheld from you. Maybe it's some trial, some suffering, it's some affliction.

Perhaps it just comes upon you, and it doesn't always have to be some unconfessed sin, which you're aware of. It may be that you've sought forgiveness, and yet this darkness is still there.

And you somehow wonder, has God kind of let me go? Has God passed me off? What can you do? What can you do? Well, one thing that you can do is to realize that even in that time, just as with Jesus, when God seems to have cast you off, what do you do?

You do what Jesus did. You go on crying. You go on crying to the God who has cast you off, and you still go on calling him, my God, my God.

[13:30] And even when he seems to cast me down, even when I can't see it, he is still the God who holds me, nevertheless. Job says, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

He is still the God who holds me. His right hand upholds me. And then I think here, in the anguish of the cross, you and I can see our deepest need.

Do you notice that Jesus cried with a loud voice, and when he made his cry, that word cry is used in the Old Testament. The Old Testament companion is a verb, which means to cry out from deliverance, for deliverance from your oppressors, from your enemies.

It's the word cry out, so that you will be delivered from oppression. But I want you to notice here, that as Jesus cries out, he is not crying out for deliverance from his enemies.

He's not asking for God's justice on his enemies. He is crying out for God himself. It's not some kind of deliverance that he's crying out for. What is he crying out for?

[14:42] He's crying out for God. For God. He cries out to God, for God. And what he's so concerned about is that God has forsaken him, so he cries to God, wanting God himself.

And isn't that a glimpse of our truest need? Isn't it true that when you cut through all the desires, and all the requests, and all the needs that we feel, it's not really God's gifts that are most vital for us.

It is God himself. I have a good friend whose mum died last summer. And my friend's dad is kind of taking over the run of the home, tries to do the cleaning, tries to do the cooking at Christmas time.

He kind of wrapped all the presents. He tried to get the home in the way that his mum would have made it. And of course, my friend, he really appreciates what his dad is doing, and he really appreciates all that his dad is trying to fill that gap that his mum has left, and all the things that she did, the little presents, the gifts, the meals that she would make that she knew her son loved.

But you see, the issue is there, isn't it? It's not the things that my friend misses, really. It's not the little things that his mum used to do for him that he really misses.

[16:24] My friend says he just wishes he could be with her. He could see her. It wasn't so much of what she did, but it was who she was.

And it's the fact that someone isn't there in the home when he goes back. It's not the kind of convenience of her doing all those things. It's the companionship. There's someone not there, and that's the real rub.

That's where the missing comes in, isn't it? Those of you who are missing someone. And it's the same with our relationship with God. I hope we never have to go to this extreme.

We can put up with a lot. We can miss a lot of God's gifts and we can miss a lot of God's gifts but the child of God can never do without the presence of God himself.

And you must have that, mustn't you? To know God as your God. Or you are thrown into despair. And this ought to help you and I this week concentrate on what is our deepest need as the people of God and what is our deepest need as a church.

[17:39] It is not the gifts of God. It's not even the mercy of God. We don't want to divide that from God himself. But it's not his gifts. It is God himself that we must have.

And that is what is behind the anguish of the cross. Thirdly, more briefly, let's see the achievement of the cross. Verses 51 to 54. In verse 51, we are given access to God.

When Jesus died, the temple of the curtain is torn from top to bottom. It's a supernatural thing. It is showing you that God is the one who tore that curtain. And it shows that we have access to God. In verses 52 and 53, those mysterious verses, Matthew shows us that we have hope in life because of Jesus' death. Matthew pleases them coming out of the graves.

Here, because of the earthquake, probably, when Jesus died. And he's saying to you and I that there is hope in the face of death.

[18:46] Jesus' death has taken the sting out of death and gives life to his people. There's another thing, isn't there? There's the torn veil, there is the risen saints, and then there is faith in Jesus.

Verse 54. The centurion says, doesn't he, truly this was the Son of God. It's interesting. I have to note you've got in verse 14, verse 53, the Jewish leaders, they use the term Son of God and they throw it in Jesus' face.

And here you have a pagan Roman soldier using it in all seriousness. Truly this man was the Son of God. It may not have been fully formed and developed faith.

But don't underestimate what a step the centurion takes. He knew what he was saying because the Roman soldiers, they were required, weren't they, to take an oath to the emperor, an oath of fidelity. In fact, that kind of thing seems to have been closely connected with emperor worship. And there were certain terms of emperor worship where you pleaded allegiance to Caesar.

[19:58] He was called Augustus, wasn't he? Which means worthy to be worshipped. And he was also called another term, the Son of God. And so the centurion looks at the lacerated, bloodied corpse of the carpenter from Galilee.

And he dares to say what he has seen. But this man on the cross, not Caesar, was the Son of God. And it's strange that God should create faith in such a man at the foot of the cross as Jesus begins to gather his church of people that confess his name.

And you may say, well, that's well and good. But that is back in Bible times and this sort of stuff happened. At the cross, these miracles can't happen again today.

And in one sense, you're right. The torn veil from top to bottom, that isn't going to happen again. And those particular people who were raised out of their graves, that is not going to be repeated.

[21:12] But there is one repeatable thing, isn't there? The one miracle at Calvary, besides the torn veil and the resurrected saints, is the centurion's faith.

And when people like you and I come to the cross this morning and look on the Son of God, that miracle is still repeated today.

It is repeatable. It occurs again and again and again. And it may well be that the Father will open your eyes if he has not yet.

And that you will be able to say with all truth and all sincerity, truly this man was the Son of God.

Let's pray together.

Let's pray together.