

Sympathy and Supremacy at Calvary

Scripture: John 19:16–30

Code: 43-109

We find ourselves again this morning in John 19. I want to encourage you to turn to John 19. The very account of the cross is here given by John – all four gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – give an account of the cross; and you would do well to study all those accounts and get the full picture. But John's purpose, as always, is stated in chapter 20 of his epistle, his gospel, verse 31: "These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name."

John writes so that we would believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the King, the Messiah, and that by believing we might have eternal life; that is John's purpose. Every paragraph, every portrait of Christ here is designed to manifest His glory. And you might think that's not possible or certainly difficult to do at the crucifixion, but just the opposite it true; His glory is on display even in His dying and John makes it clear to us. So let me read, beginning in verse 16, John 19.

"So then he – " Pilate " – handed Him – " Jesus " – over to them – " the Roman soldiers " – to be crucified. They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, 'Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.' Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews"; but that He said, "I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'

"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to ever soldier and also the tunic: now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be'; this was to fulfill the scripture: 'They divided My outer garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.' Therefore the soldiers did these things.

"But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

"After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the scripture, said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a bunch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

Obviously, we all understand that the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ was the most blessed act of

divine love and divine justice ever to occur. That's at the very heart of the Christian faith. And while the Jews were complicit in rejecting Christ and desiring Him to be killed, and the Romans actually did the killing, it was God who was fulfilling His plan by putting His Son on the cross. The crucifixion is an act of God by which God fulfills His purpose to secure the eternal salvation of millions of souls and open the door to heaven for them, while at the same time not compromising His justice. He has to punish sin and so He punishes it in Christ; this protects His holiness. But He also wants to forgive sinners, because that's His love. Love and holiness then meet at the cross. Our Lord Jesus is not a mere victim of unjust and wicked men, though He was murdered unjustly and wickedly and illegally; He died willingly. Even more than that, He died willingly in submission to the will of the Father who had sent Him to be the sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people.

The death of Christ on the cross is the purest act of love ever. It is the most perfect sacrifice for sin and the only one that atones. It is the noblest gift that heaven ever gave sinners, and it is the highest form of divine justice. It is so rich an event that a lifetime, an eternity cannot absorb its full glory. The death of the Son of God is the work of the Father and the Son to provide forgiveness for all who believe in Him.

As you look at what I just read I want you to see the glory of Christ manifest in this event. On the surface you might think that there's little glory to be seen in the death of Christ, this horrible crucifixion where the sinless Son of God is nailed to a cross, hanging naked, virtually naked since the clothing that He had were gambled for at the foot of the cross. The shame of it is unspeakable; the agony of it, incomparable.

Is there any glory for Christ here at all? If there is, it would be a kind of irony, wouldn't it, that when men have done their worst, and in a very real sense, God has done His worst, His most massive act of judgment, there would still be glory seen in Christ. Well, that is what John wants us to see, and he points to it in four ways: with reference to Scripture, with reference to the sign over Jesus' head, with reference to the sympathy that our Lord demonstrates, and with reference to His supremacy or His sovereignty over the very act of dying.

Now we have already looked at how the fulfillment of Scripture brings glory to Christ. The small details of His dying that John records have connections to Old Testament scriptures. We saw the glory of Christ in the fulfillment of Scripture. We also saw the glory of Christ in the sign that was put above Him which offended the Jews, and that was Pilate's intent. He was a Roman governor who had been blackmailed by the Jews to executing Jesus, and this was his little moment of vengeance. So here is the irony that first appears in this amazing section. It is an irony that wicked men, godless men, ignorant men doing the worst they can do are fulfilling Scripture. It is an irony that godless, ignorant, Roman governor Pilate, wanting to heap vengeance and scorn on the Jews, ends up putting a statement above the head of Jesus that is absolutely true; and there are more ironies to come.

Let's look at the third word that helps us follow the flow, the word "sympathy." We'll pick up the story where we left off last time at verse 25 with the words, "But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' From that hour the disciple took her into his own household." Here is an act of sympathy toward Mary, His mother.

There are at the foot of the cross only four followers of Jesus. There were many more than this as we know, but only four were there. The apostles had fled, with the exception of one man, and that is John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and four women. It was a very courageous thing to do, because they were identifying with a criminal who was being executed. It took courage to show up. More than courage, it took overwhelming, overpowering love.

And I reminded you last time, and I'll repeat it, that the mother of Jesus is simply identified by John as His mother, His mother, without even mentioning her name, which is consistent in reminding us of the low profile that Mary has in the New Testament. Obviously, she was chosen by God to be the earthly mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, but she finds no special place in redemption beyond that she bore the Son of God.

Back in Luke 2 she was told that this Child had come into the world for the rising and the falling of many, and through Him a sword would pierce her soul. She had raised the perfect sinless Son of God in her home. She was loved by Him with a love that was not like any other love any other human being has ever known, and consequently she loved Him in a way she couldn't possibly love anybody else. She being loved by Him in a way that no one could ever be loved, and loving in a way that no one has ever loved, was bound to Him in a way that no human being could ever know but her. And here it ends at the cross, and a sword goes through her soul.

Joseph has disappeared from the gospel records long before this; no doubt he is dead. Mary has been cared for by Jesus, and brothers and sisters; but at this point, none of them believe in Him. Back in the 7th chapter of John we are told they did not believe in Him. So now His mother needs someone to care for her, someone who believes in Him, someone who believes in Him strongly, someone who will represent Him to her, and that someone happens to be the only disciple standing there. It is the disciple identified as the disciple whom Jesus loved; he's standing there as well; that's John.

In his entire gospel he never refers to himself or his family by name. He does have a name: John. He has a nickname, along with his brother James, and their nickname was sons of thunder: Boanerges. They had earned those nicknames because they were brash, bold men, so brash and so bold as to have sent their mother to ask Jesus if He would give them the right and the left-hand place when He came into His kingdom. Somewhat egotistical, self-promoting, bold, brash men.

In fact, in the 9th chapter of Luke they came into a village, a Samaritan village, and they were rejected by that village. They were trying to prepare a way for the Lord Jesus to come, and the people would not receive Him. So, "When James and John – " Luke 9:54 " – saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'" Sounds like sons of thunder. "He turned and rebuked them, and said, ' You do not know what spirit you're of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them,' and went to another village." "Back off, sons of thunder." As I say, they had earned that name.

But something dramatic has happened to John, because as he looks back over his life from his old age when he wrote this gospel – he was a very old man when he wrote this gospel – and as he looks back and writes this he sees himself completely changed. And so back in chapter 13 when he has to refer to himself, he says this: "There was reclining on Jesus' bosom – " or leaning toward Jesus " – one of His disciples whom Jesus loved." And that's how he referred to himself when he wrote the account of the cross, chapter 19.

That's how he refers to himself again at the resurrection in chapter 20, verse 2: "Mary Magdalene ran, came to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved." That's how he referred to himself in chapter 21, verse 7, when the Lord appears: "Therefore the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter 'It is the Lord.'"

Now all of a sudden he is the disciple whom Jesus loved. I think that overwhelmed him, because there's something about being a son of thunder that doesn't make you necessarily lovable. He had experienced the love of Christ and it had transformed him, he became known as the apostle of love, and if there's anything that identifies his gospel is that he understands the love of God and the love of Christ.

"God so loved the world," is perhaps the most familiar verse in his gospel. When he wrote his first epistle, it's all about love. So here is a transformed man, a man once known for wanting to call down fire from heaven and burn up an entire town has become the apostle of love, and it is because he has been loved by the Lord that he loves in return.

So Jesus looks down, sees His mother, His mother's sister, who by the way is Salome – we know from the other gospel accounts. She's the wife of Zebedee, who is the father of, and therefore she's the mother of James and John. And then there's Mary, the wife of Clopas, which is a form of Alphaeus. She's the mother of an apostle James the son of Alphaeus, sometimes called James the Less; and familiar Mary Magdalen, the woman Luke 8 says who was delivered from eight demons by the Lord. Three of these women are named Mary, which means bitterness – a very popular name, because it was the name of Miriam, the sister of Moses. Many Jewish mothers chose to use that.

So the women are there, but Jesus focus is on His mother. Even though she is not named – and that's consistent with the fact that she plays absolutely no role in the story of redemption, none at all. She appears only once more in the book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 14, where it says that she was there in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost, along with Jesus' brothers who, after the resurrection and before the Day of Pentecost, had come to faith in Jesus Christ. She was there. She is never again referred to in the entire New Testament. She plays no role whatsoever in salvation.

But she needs to be cared for. She is not a supernatural being; she is a widow who has lost her greatest love, her firstborn Son; and the rest of her children don't believe in Him. She needs someone to care for her. And so Jesus looks down at her and says, "Woman, behold, your son!" and He's directing her to the apostle John, because He looks to the apostle John, verse 27, and says, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

I told you last time He says, "Woman." And you might think that's a little cold and indifferent. Why doesn't He call her mother? Well, that went away three years before this when He began His ministry. The first miracle He ever did began His ministry in the 2nd chapter of John. Was at the wedding at Cana. This is a family well-known to the family of Jesus. Cana is a little kind of suburb of Nazareth, and they ran out of wine, and Mary comes to Jesus and says, "They're out of wine," and Jesus says, "Woman."

I'm sure growing up as a kid He called her mother, whatever the dominative form of that would have been to Him in that family; but no more. As soon as He stepped into ministry the relationship on the

human level ended, it ended. It is a term, by the way, of dignity. It is not at all pejorative; it is a term of respect. It is not harsh; it is not discourteous; it is dignified. And we know His love for her, because what He's saying here is to care for her. But woman reminds her of what she has heard no doubt before, since that wedding back in Cana, that she no longer has a relationship to Him like she had for 30 years.

She had a preview of this back in the 3rd chapter of Mark. Jesus was in a very strong encounter with Jewish leaders, scribes, and He is condemning them in the 3rd chapter of Mark. And then it says in verse 31, "Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.'" Scripture tells us that His brothers thought He was mad, insane. So His mother and His brothers have come looking for Him.

"Answering them, He said this, 'Who are My mother and My brothers?' And looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, 'Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.'" The human relationships ended when He began His ministry.

The apostle Paul understood this even from his perspective. Second Corinthians 5, verse 14, talks about Christ dying. And then in verse 15 He died for all and rose again. And then in verse 16 he says, "Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer." Once he says, "I, as a persecutor of Christianity, had a human relationship to Jesus. I saw Him as a man who was an apostate, who was a heretic, who was a rebel, who was a threat to Judaism, but I no longer have a relationship with Him according to the flesh now that I know He's the Savior of the world."

She no longer has that relationship to Jesus. Doesn't mean she loves Him any less, and certainly He didn't love her any less, because He loved His own who were in the world to the end, to extreme – eternal blessing. But here He's expressing His sympathy for His mother. This is the heart of God, even in the midst of the most horrible suffering. If there was ever a moment in the life of the Lord when He might have checked His sympathy at the door, this would have been it. But really since the beginning of Thursday night, and now we're into Friday when He's being crucified, it just seems like He's been pouring love out. It started in chapter 13 when they got to the upper room, and John writes, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the max."

A display of love literally pours out of Him starting on that Thursday night. It shows up in His washing their dirty feet, a humble act of love usually reserved for the lowest servant, and He says to them in 13:34, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, as I have just loved you in humbling sacrificial love; that's how you love one another. And by this all men will know that you're My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In chapter 14 His love continues. They're very troubled, so He says, "Don't let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I'll come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

"Don't be sad; I love you. I love you to the limits of deity, infinity. I love you enough to humble Myself

and wash your feet.” That’s lowly service. “I love you enough to prepare a room for you in heaven.” That’s the elevated service. “I love you.” He’s concerned that they know He loves them.

In chapter 14 again and verse 16, same evening, Thursday night in the upper room, He says, “I’ll ask the Father, He’ll give you another Helper, another Comforter that He’ll be with you forever, the Spirit of truth.”

“I don’t want you to feel like you don’t have any comfort. I don’t want you to feel like you don’t have any help.” Verse 18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me.”

Verse 26 He says, “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He’ll teach you all things, bring to your remembrance all that I’ve said to you.” “I don’t want you to forget anything, I want you to know all the truth, so I’m sending the Holy Spirit.”

Verse 27, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Don’t let your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid. I will – ” verse 28 “ – come to you.”

In chapter 15, verse 11, He says, “These things I’ve spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and your joy may be made full.” “I love you. I love you enough to wash your dirty feet and meet your lowliest need. I love you so much I’m preparing a room for you in heaven. I love you so much I’m coming back to you in the form of the Holy Spirit, and I’m going to teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance. I love you so much I’m going to grant you My peace, and other worldly peace. I love you so much I’m going to give you My joy.”

“My love for you is so great.” Verse 13, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” “I love you so much I’m going to die for you. I love you.” This is His final message, it’s a message of love.

Even in chapter 16, verse 22, “Therefore you too have grief now; but I’ll see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.” “I’m going to come back in the form of the Holy Spirit, and I’m going to give you so much joy, joy that can never be taken away.”

“ Furthermore, whatever you ask.” Verse 24, “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you’ll receive, so that your joy may be made full.” Joy, peace, the Holy Spirit, truth – all these gifts.

In chapter 17, verse 24, in His prayer, verses 23 and 24, end of verse 23, He’s talking to the Father and He says, “I want the world to know that You sent Me, and loved them – ” His disciples “ – even as You loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory.”

What else could you ever ask for? He’s going to bring all of His own to heavenly places to see His glory. This is just a massive expression of love. So here is Jesus going through these horrifying hours, so agonizing that in the garden He’s sweating as it were great drops of blood. He’s crying out if there’s any way to the Father to remove Him from this horrible suffering under judgment; would He do it. The agonies are incomprehensible to us, and yet all along He just keeps pulling them forward

out of their sorrow, out of their anxieties, out of their fears, by referring again, and again, and again, not to some nebulous kind of love, but to all the specific expressions of love. This is a sympathy that is literally beyond our ability to understand.

So here's another irony. In the scene of the greatest hate, love dominates, love dominates. That brings us to the final little section in verse 28, the sovereignty of Christ, or the supremacy of Christ is seen here: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the scripture, said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

Here you see divine sovereignty, divine supremacy. He controls His dying. First of all, you see omniscience. Omniscience is to know everything; omnipotence is to have all power. It says in verse 28, "Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished – " He knows everything, because as God He has omniscience. He knows the plan of God exactly. He knows when every single detail has been accomplished. He knows that all scripture must be fulfilled in His dying. He knows He's near the end.

Back in the prayer of John 17:4, He said, "I have accomplished the work you gave Me to do." That was anticipating this moment some hours later the next day. But there was one prophecy yet to be fulfilled, and He knew it, and He knew it, and so He says, "I am thirsty." What did He have in mind? He had in mind Psalm 69:21.

Psalm 69:21 says, "They gave me gall, but for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink, they gave me sour wine to drink." That's Psalm 69:21, "They gave me sour wine to drink." That prophecy from 69:21 had to be fulfilled, so verse 29 says, "A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth."

In the 15th chapter of Mark, 36th verse, Mark writes, "Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, a hyssop reed, gave Him a drink." Why? Because the promise of the Old Testament was that this would occur at the death of Messiah, "And they gave Him sour wine to drink."

They had tried to give Him gall, but He didn't take it, because gall, which is different, was a sedative to try to diminish the pain because it was so horrifying. He refused that, because he wanted the full impact of the suffering.

What was the sour wine? Well, there are a couple of possibilities; maybe both are true. Some say that it was there for the soldiers to quench their thirst. It was a cheap form of wine, almost a vinegar. Others say it was used to assuage the thirst of the dying victim for the purpose of extending his agony. They would basically die of literally drying up, just completely drying up, totally parched. And so they would give them something to drink, such as this sour wine, to extend their agony. He refused the gall, but He took the sour wine, and His thirst was quenched.

Somebody might say, "Well, that didn't prolong His life." No, it never was intended to prolong His life, it was only intended to fulfill the scripture. Once the scripture was fulfilled – and that was the last scripture – there was nothing else to do. That psalm says, "And for My thirst they gave Me sour wine

to drink.”

Notice that they put a sponge on the end of a hyssop reed, put it up to His mouth. Anybody reading that would immediately think of Exodus 12 – any Jewish person – Exodus 12, Passover night in Egypt. When the angel of death came you had to have blood on the door posts and the crosspiece or the angel of death would kill your firstborn. They were told to sacrifice the lamb, and take the spread it on the doorpost and the crosspiece using hyssop, using hyssop.

Here is the true Passover Lamb, and hyssop again plays a part in the scene. The Jews would have to think back to the saving blood of the Passover lamb. But here is the final and only true Passover Lamb. “Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘*Tetelestai*, It has been finished, it is finished!’ He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.”

You need to know He died way ahead of schedule for crucified people. You also need to know that He is not a wimp, He is not an emaciated wan, weak person who looks anorexic. If ever there was a man who was all that manhood could be, He was that man. No sin, no corruption, and it’s important for you to know that when He died, He died because He willed Himself to die, and He gave up His spirit. It says in Matthew 27:50 and Mark 15:37 that when He said, “It is finished,” He was shouting.

Not only did people on a cross die of dehydration, but asphyxiation. But it’s too soon for that for Him, and He’s just been given something to drink. He is still strong. He shouts at the top of His voice, and then He bows His own head – no violent jerk, no slump. The verb has been translated in other places, “He pillowed His head and gave up His spirit.”

John 10:17-18 He said, “No man takes My life from Me; I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down; I have power to take it up again.” And He’ll do that Sunday morning: “It is finished!” And then Luke says that He cried, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit,” and He willed His own being out of that body into heaven.

What did He finish? He finished redemption by substitution. He finished bearing the wrath of God for the sins of His people. All of this, again, powerful; and the irony here is a dying man who controls death and life. All this powerful testimony to the deity of Christ had an immediate impact.

I hope that you see His glory in looking at this passage with me over these last few weeks. But I’m giving you a 2,000 year later sort of second-hand account. I want you to see what actually happened with those watching Him die. Turn your Bible to Luke 23, and we’ll close with this, Luke 23; just three scenes here, starting in verse 39: “One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, ‘Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!’” That’s scorn, blasphemy, mockery. They were doing that all around the cross.

But the other answer, and I need to say before I go any further, that the other, we are told by the other gospel writers, was also hurling abuse and blaspheming Jesus at the beginning. But now something has changed and he is “rebuking the other criminal saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, since you’re under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we’re receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he was saying, ‘Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’ And He said to me, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise.’” This man was literally converted watching Jesus die.

He started out hurling abuse and blasphemy of Jesus, and he is going to be in heaven because of what he saw on the cross. The glory of Christ was on display.

Spurgeon wrote, "Stripped of His clothes, nailed to a cross, our Lord was mocked by a ribald crowd, was dying in agony. So that was no common faith, which at such a moment could believe in Jesus as Lord and King. He was surrounded by scoffers, yet He became our Lord's last companion on earth and first companion at the gate of heaven."

Again, another of the amazing ironies at Calvary, while they are killing Him as a blasphemer, He is saving the very people blaspheming Him. And Matthew and Mark tell us that this thief, like the other, started out "hurling abuse at Jesus." This is a transformation of a man by what he sees in the dying of Jesus; he is transformed at the cross. He came to fear God. "Do you not even fear God?" verse 40, he says to his fellow criminal. "Do you not fear God?"

He fears judgment from God. This wicked, rebel sinner went from blaspheming Jesus after a life of crime to rebuking the other thief for doing so. While his mind and his body are in severe experience of torture and shame, the same as Jesus is enduring physically, he perceives the truth that God is at work here, and that what is happening to him is a judgment, and he about to face God. He is terrified. "Do you not fear God?" Not only is he fearing God, which men don't normally do. It is not common for men to fear God – we just read that in Romans 3. There is no fear of God in their eyes.

He not only fears God, but he understands his own sinfulness. He says to the thief, the other one, "Since you're under the same sentence of condemnation. And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds."

He fears God, he fears the judgment of God, he recognized it's his own sin. He's like the prodigal who came to his senses at the last moment. He's a true confessor of the true God who is the Judge. He's a true confessor of himself as a sinner full of guilt and deserving condemnation. He knows he needs mercy, he knows he needs grace, he knows he needs forgiveness to escape judgment, and there's no question in my mind that he heard what Jesus said back in verse 34 when Jesus said loudly, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," so he knew there was forgiveness, even for the worst criminal.

And then he knew that Jesus was sinless. He said, "This man has done nothing." And he calls Him Jesus, Jehovah saves, and says, "Remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

Now he knew no one survives crucifixion, no one; you can't survive it. So he knew that not only would Jesus rise, but Jesus could raise him also. He may have known Daniel 12:2 where Daniel promises the resurrection of life and the resurrection of disgrace and contempt.

His theology has been formed while he's been watching Jesus in His death. "Jesus is the King. Jesus has the power of life. He's going to rise from the dead; he can raise me from the dead. He has come to forgive our sins. He intercedes for us with the Father that we might be forgiven even of the worst of crimes." He offered that forgiveness to the very ones killing Him. He is a believer in Jesus, and he wants forgiveness, he wants mercy, and he wants to be there with Jesus in paradise, or in heaven. When Jesus comes back to life, he wants to come to life as well.

Our Lord didn't say to him, "You know, you're close, but you need a little more theology." He said, "Truly today you'll be with Me in paradise." He saw the power of the cross at the cross. He saw the power of the cross on the cross. He saw the power of the cross from the cross, and he wasn't alone.

Down to verse 47 in Luke 23, "Now when the centurion – " that the guy who was in charge of the whole thing, one of the Roman soldiers who was over a large number of men, a century, a centurion, at least a hundred men " – saw what had happened, he began praising God." This is a Roman. This is a Gentile Roman. "He began praising God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent.'" That's John's term.

Let me read you what Matthew 27:54 says. "Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus – " this would be the soldiers, the executioners " – when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening – " that's the darkness, in the middle of the day pitch black darkness then a massive earthquake, " – when they saw all of this they became very frightened and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" So they, the Romans, came to the conclusion by looking at Jesus dying that He was deity. They knew Him to be God. Blackness, pitch blackness in the middle of the day, massive earthquake, dying the way He died, saying the things He said; they were convinced of His glory by looking at the cross.

And then while you're in Luke 23, one other interesting group, verse 48, "All the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts." This is a Jewish sign of guilt and grief and terror.

Pounding on their chests like the publican, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." They were terrified. They were terrified, because Jesus spoke loudly and they all heard what He said. They were terrified of the pitch black darkness. They were terrified of the earthquake which split the veil in the temple top to bottom and opened the Holy of Holies for all to see. They were terrified by that earthquake that also split the rocks so that even dead people came back to life. They were terrified, and they left pounding their breasts in absolute fear.

I'm sure there were weeks of absolute dread. I'm sure there people with panic attacks: "What have we done? What if He was the Son of God? We said it, didn't we, on Monday when He came in, 'Son of David, Messiah, King.' We said that; we hailed Him as that. We saw His miracles; we heard His teaching. We saw the cross; we were there with the darkness; we were there with the earthquake, horror of horrors. What is going to happen to us?"

And then came the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2, and Peter stands up to preach to the same crowd gathered in the same city of Jerusalem. "And now, however, Jesus whom you killed has been raised up again." And Peter preaches the resurrection. And then he says this: "He has not only been raised, but He has been – " verse 33 " – exalted to the right hand of God." This would even be more terrifying. "Oh, how terrifying that we killed Him. How terrifying that God raised Him. We're doomed. How terrifying that God took Him back and seated Him at His right hand, the hand of power. How terrifying."

Peter then reaches this climatic point in verse 36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified." "You killed Him; God exalted Him." I mean their hearts must have been literally racing with fear.

“When they heard this – ” verse 37 “ – they were pierced to the heart.” I think they’d been suffering since the day of the crucifixion till this day – weeks. And so they cry to Peter and the rest, “Brethren, what do we do? What do we do?”

And here comes gospel grace. “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins; and you’ll receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.’ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’”

He offers them what? Salvation. No wonder verse 41 says, “Those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added – ” how many? “ Three thousand people finally got relief from being terrified since they stood by the cross.

Proof is conclusive; He is the Christ. The thief saw it, the soldiers saw it, the crowd saw it, and grace was offered to all of them. Peter also said, “There’s no salvation in any other name, only the name of Jesus, only salvation from judgment and hell, the only way to heaven; not by works, but by faith in Him. Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” No matter what sins you’ve committed, these were as bad as it gets, and grace and forgiveness is offered.

Father, we are so grateful for, again, the richness of Your Word, and even the experience of being there by virtue of inspired Holy Scripture. We thank You for the picture of Christ in glory on the cross that we have seen. It is the most glorious of all sights. Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious, as we heard earlier, the sight of Him on the cross.

Work in every life and every heart. Lord, You opened the heart of the criminal, You opened the heart of the crucifiers, and You opened the hearts of the crowds. Would You open hearts even today to embrace Christ for Your glory?

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