

Come and See: The Cross of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] If you have your Bibles, turn to Mark chapter 15. Haven't you been blessed by this music this morning? Some of you have. If you've ever been in worship and not been blessed by the music, you know the difference.

I can promise you that. And we have been blessed this morning. Well, the events of the last week of Christ are the basis of really everything that a Christian places his or her faith on.

And I really don't believe that you get the complete message from one event without looking at another event of the events of the last week of Christ.

In other words, to understand the significance of the triumphal entry of Christ when he rode through on the donkey and people threw down their garments and palm branches and shouted, Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, which was on Palm Sunday, which is today. To understand that, you must see the cross. And to understand the significance and the depth of the meaning of the cross, I believe you have to look at the agonies of the garden.

[1 : 1 8] And we've done that together. To understand the triumph of the empty tomb, I believe you have to understand the cross of Christ.

Over the last few weeks, we've explored the teachings and the events of the upper room. And we've considered the pressing weight of the garden. And we've even witnessed through Scripture the midnight, unjust scramble of the courts maneuvering to do what they needed to do or wanted to do to Jesus.

This morning, we look at the cross of Christ. And to be blunt, it's where all the world changed, was in the cross of Christ.

Mark chapter 15, beginning in verse 16. It says, And the soldiers led him away inside the palace.

That's the governor's headquarters. And they called together the whole battalion. They clothed him in a purple cloak and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him.

[2 : 3 0] They began to salute him. Hail, King of the Jews! They were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

And they brought him to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of a skull. And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

And they crucified and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him, and the inscription of the, that's about 9 a.m., and the inscription of the charge against him read, the king of the Jews.

And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. Now down to verse 33, and it says this, And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

[3 : 49] And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama shebachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he's calling Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last, and the curtain of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I pray today that as we look at the events of the cross and the significance of the cross, and we look at the details of it, I pray, dear God, that the details of it will not get in the way of the message of the cross, dear Father.

Lord, I also pray that whatever else is in our hearts and lives today that may distract us in the next few moments. God, I pray that you'll remove those things from our mind, that in a Holy Spirit sweep, you'll just allow us to focus on the cross of Christ together.

[5 : 22] In Jesus' name. Amen. As horrible as it is, and I do not want to ever look as if I enjoy talking about such matters, I believe we need to look into the depths of the cross and understand the significance of what the Lord Jesus went through on the cross.

Come with me and let's look at the cross of Christ. Come and see the physical agony of the cross. Jesus was battered, he was bruised, he was ridiculed, he was mocked.

On his way to the cross, they placed a crown of thorns upon his brow, and they hit him in the head with a reed. Remember a scalp that was already sensitive and sore due to a stress-related malady that he had suffered in the garden.

Gospel writer tells us that he was sweating drops of blood, which speaks of hematomas, which is a painful, sensitive matter in the face that can only be caused by the worst of stress, and on top of that, they place a crown of thorns upon him, thorns of an inch or two long a piece, drive him into his head by beating him in the head with a stick.

John 19, 1 tells us that he was flogged. Flogging was not intended for execution, but instead often was used instead of execution, and at times they would do it along with crucifixion, which they did to Christ.

[7 : 05] The purpose of the scourging was not to kill a man, but to brutally, painfully humiliate the man.

It was meant as a demeaning and a belittling, so much so that the Roman citizens could not even be flogged.

They didn't allow them to. They used what they called a flagellum. It was similar to what the British called the cat of nine tails. It was a whip with as many as nine strands coming out from the end of it, and on those leather strands, they were weighed down with pieces of lead or metal or pieces of bone.

They were intended to increase the impact of the whip hitting the flesh when brought down in force, as well the depths of the wounds of such a lash absolutely amazed people.

Eusebius, an ancient historian, said this. He said, The lacerations were, and I quote, Even to innermost veins and arteries, sometimes the hidden inward parts of the body, both their bowels and their members were exposed to view.

[8 : 30] Bound to a post, stretched out over a frame, they were beaten from shoulders to legs until the flesh was literally shredded and the inner parts exposed. The Jews limited that to only 40 lashes.

And I always say you get your best counting buddy to count for you when you do that, because if they gave more than 40 lashes, they got the same treatment themselves. So there became a trend for the Jews to stop at 39, just in case the old boy might have missed one.

But not for the Romans. They didn't care. They could whip you as long as they gauged necessary, and they did.

He was then led out to be crucified. The one to be crucified, instead of carrying the whole cross, as we typically have seen, probably in reality carried the horizontal cross beam called the Pertullum, weighed somewhere between 75 and 125 pounds.

However, he was not able to carry it. Christ was not able to carry it for long because of the beating that he had endured. And, you know, the Romans loved the exhibition of a man having to struggle under that.

[9 : 59] So sometimes the Romans, when one would move too slowly with the cross beam, they'd actually tie a rope around him and pull him along the way to help him, to make it more agony.

But for Jesus, they got Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross from there, and down the Via Della Rosa, they went out of the city gate into a place called Golgotha, which is Greek for the place of the skull.

Later, and you may be familiar with it being called Calvary, that's the Latin term for it. Having reached his destination, his hands were nailed to the crossbar right through the hollow spot above the wrist.

If he was actually nailed in the hand, it would have tore through. So instead, they found this hollow part right at the end of what they call the lifeline, and there's a hollow spot there that they hit where there's no vital artery with nails that were about four to five inches long, very similar to a more narrow railroad spike.

Those nails symbolized Roman cruelty. Other societies would rope a man to the cross, but not Rome.

[11 : 20] The crossbar had a hollowed-out cup in the center of it, and that crossbar was lifted up and placed upon the stipes that usually were planted in the ground vertically and stayed there with a point on the end, so it just kind of fit like a log cabin fits together.

Or if you don't know what that is, like a Lego. How about that? Fit together. Jesus was then placed in the center as the chief criminal. His greatest agony, however, was as he hung.

Jim Bishop wrote a book called The Day Jesus Died, and he described the agony of the cross like this. To be able to breathe, the victim had to stay in constant motion, literally dragging himself up and down until he could no longer.

Each time the pain mounted, his arms, his legs, entire torso, screamed in pain. Slowly and steadily, he was being asphyxiated, as if two thumbs were pressing against his throat.

Some say the crucified ones died of suffocation. Others, hunger. Still others, sheer exhaustion as their bodies just wore out.

[12 : 36] End of quote. The Roman soldiers were experts in crucifying. They learned how to do it right, and they also learned that when you bend a man's knees at the proper angle, you could actually prolong his agony.

When they were ready for them to die, they would simply shatter the legs of the man who could no longer pull himself up on the cross and therefore would asphyxiate. Death came quickly after that.

Now, you may be thinking, why do you share all that? Why all the grotesque? Why deal with that? I don't have to, but I want you to know what Jesus suffered for our sins.

Come and see. Not only the physical agony, but come and see the physical darkness because while Christ hung on the cross, the sky strangely turned black, although the time was noon.

For three hours, the sky was as dark as night in the middle of the day until about three o'clock when Jesus died. And the moment he died, the earth began to shake. The earthquake was so violent, it says that rocks split.

[14 : 00] It was not a rumbling. It was more than a typical tremor. And quite honestly, it had to be somewhat horrifying to be standing in that area and to be witnessing such a horrific experience.

It was a physical darkness. But quite honestly, I believe the greatest agony and darkness of the cross was not physical, but instead was spiritual.

Understand and come and see the physical, the spiritual agony of the cross. Understand that Jesus was sinless and understand that it is sin that restrains us from having a perfect Garden of Eden type experience with the Lord.

Jesus had never had a conflict with the Father. Jesus was never, never sinned, was not born into sin, never even had a hindrance in his relationship with the Father.

Never did he suffer with understanding what God was up to. He was literally the mind of Christ. He knew exactly what the Father would have.

[15 : 19] Christ was sinless without any hindrance. That is until he became sin on our behalf. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21 puts it this way, for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And for the first time in his life there was a sin hindrance between Christ and the Father as the weight of the world's sins fell upon his shoulders and hid the face of God from him for the first time and he felt forsaken by both God and man.

As he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and faced hell so we don't have to, there had to be a powerful sense of the forsakenness of the Father and it was absolute spiritual agony for the Lord.

I told you a couple of weeks ago that that's the cup that he spoke of in the garden and that's what he dreaded the most. The spiritual agony.

But in the midst of that I also want you to see the, to come and see the spiritual darkness. because while the sinless Lamb of God is dying for the sins of the world the sky strangely turned black although the time was noon and stayed that way until he died.

[16 : 43] And in that darkness the soldiers gambled for his clothing. Remember they had taken his clothing off and put a mocking purple robe on him and beat him with it and then took it back off and put his clothes back on him.

And then as he hung before he hung they stripped him of those clothing. Scripture tells us that he wore a seamless tunic which is a very nice piece of clothing.

Normally it was had seams. And while he died for their sins they gambled for that and the other articles of clothing that he had.

While he was dying for their sins they gambled and the sky turned black. As well the very people that he died for came by and hurled insults at him made sarcastic and mocking remarks that if he was so miraculous why don't he save himself?

The reason why he didn't save himself is because he was too busy saving them. it was a dark moment. We live in a world of dark moments.

[17 : 58] We had a dark moment last week or ten days ago when a crazy person went to school in Nashville killed innocent victims.

Horrible dark moment. last week the storms that rolled through the dark killed two dozen people in Mississippi and destroyed nearly 2,000 homes and then a revisit of storms just this past Friday night.

That's dark. But I want you to understand there has never been one more than the darkness of high noon when the Savior hung on the cross for you and me and them and all the world.

It is horrible to look at even 2,000 years later but I think you have to understand the spiritual darkness. I am just thankful that it don't stop there because if it did I wouldn't have told you all of that and honestly I wouldn't be standing here doing what I'm doing.

I want you to come and see the spiritual hope that comes from the cross because there's a wonderful spiritual hope in this passage that I don't want you to miss at all and that is eternal life.

[19 : 41] It's in Luke chapter 23 verse 39 and it says this one of the criminals who were hanged railed at him saying are you not the Christ save yourself and us but the other rebuked him and said do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation and we indeed justly for we are receiving the reward of our deeds for this man has done nothing wrong and he said Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom and he said truly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise I want you to understand the spiritual hope is eternal life in Christ he gave eternal life to a robber and a bandit that hung beside him Matthew 27 verse 44 tells us that the robbers of the bandits on both sides of him were insulting Christ on the cross they joined in with the crowd taunting this so-called king and then something happened one of them suddenly changed his attitude and thought and when the other taunted he corrected him and Luke 23 says that he said to him do you not fear God since you're under the same sentence of condemnation what changed that man what happened in the midst of that

I believe it was what he saw for the first time and that was he saw a king for the first time he saw the Christ for the first time for the first time it was sinking in that this God man was real but secondly I want you to notice the silence Jesus never sparred back he let them waggle their tongues however thank God however it happened he saw Jesus he submitted himself to Christ asked for mercy and Jesus said remember he said Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus replied today you shall be with me in paradise and theologians have tried to figure out where paradise is it's fascinating to hear their conversation you know what's most important to me paradise is where Jesus is because he says today you shall be with me in paradise salvation came to that man that day and that gives hope to all that we meet no matter your circumstances no matter your lifestyle no matter the good choices in your life no matter the bad choices in your life it's not the will of God that any should perish but that all should come to have eternal life it means so much more to

Christ that he gave it means so much to Christ that he gave his life for you to have that opportunity and if he'll save a hardened convicted criminal on his death cross don't you dare wonder whether Christ is willing to save you or not he died for you he bore the cross for you I'm thankful for the eternal life that he gives but I'm also thankful for the eternal access because when the earthquake at that moment he died rocks split it was so violent that scripture says that it tore the veil in the holy of holies in half that curtain was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide and they say that it was as wide as the palm of a man's hand and yet in the midst of that earthquake it split tore all the way and what's fascinating to me about that is that it ripped from top to bottom it would have made a lot of sense in an earthquake if the ground split so much that it caused the curtain to split as well that would make sense but the veil was ripped from top to bottom the veil was ripped by God as the earth quaked by God in the midst of the darkness by God what a horrible experience to live through but the

Hebrew writer tells us what that means Hebrews chapter 10 verses 19 through 25 says this therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh and since we have a great priest over the house of God let us draw near with a true heart and full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water and let us hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as too many are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near it is because of Christ my friend that we can approach the throne of God forgiven clean and we can enter boldly we can stand strong in our faith and we can we can trust the word of

God because he does what he says he'll do he's faithful to his promises and understanding that what he's done for us and understanding how he's faithful to his promises and understanding that whatever tomorrow holds he's already there understanding all that it ought to stir us up it ought to change our lives and as Christians we ought to we ought to stir each other up to encourage each other in our faith it ought to encourage us to invite others to come to Christ through the work of the cross come and see the cross of Christ it'll change your life for all eternity with every head bowed and every eye closed I want to ask you if you've ever surrendered your heart and life to the

[26 : 28] Lord Jesus Christ has there ever been a time when you can go back to where you've committed your life to Christ confess that you'd sinned ask him to forgive you and promise to live for him none of us have done that sufficiently living for him but it all begins with the first step and if you've never taken that first step or unsure about that first step to come to Christ I want you to know today's the day of salvation if you'll come to him today he'll save you he'll change you that yearning that you have within you to make a decision for Christ didn't come from you it came from him he's calling you to himself maybe you're here this morning and you do know that you're a Christian but the reality is your life is not a life of the cross as he told us to deny ourselves and pick up our cross and carry it daily is your life reflected of the cross

Christian or is today a day of renewal for you I want you to know that you can renew your life right where you are you can have a pastor pray for you or you can just come to this altar and lay it down before God but I encourage you to not let anything be a hindrance in your life when you leave here and you'll walk with the Lord maybe you're here and you're visiting with us this morning and God's drawing you to be a part of this church how we'd love for you to be a part of our fellowship I encourage you to come we'd love to guide you in that process or maybe you're here and you've given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus but you've never publicly acknowledged it it was a private decision that you made and you've never shared that with anybody you need to be baptized you just come say pastor I know I'm saved but I need to be baptized as a believer and we'll guide you in that we're going to stand right after

I pray and we're going to sing but more important than singing I encourage you to be obedient and follow him heavenly father I love you and I thank you dear God for the love that you have for us and I ask right now father that you'll work and you'll move in the hearts and lives of each individual in this place and help us to be obedient to follow you as you lead us oh God I pray in Jesus name amen