

The Power of The Cross

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[0:00] So our text this morning is in Matthew 27, verse 45 through 62. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand.

! We'd love to get you a Bible. If you'd love to have a Bible and follow along with us, please raise your hand if you don't have a Bible and like to have one. Great. Well, guys, as I said, I feel utterly inadequate, and we need God's help this morning.

We need God's help. We need Him to open the eyes of our minds and our hearts to His Word. So would you join with me in prayer as we approach God's Word together?

Father, You are glorious. Father, Your plan of salvation from before the beginning of time, Father, is made known to us.

It's been made known to us throughout the Gospel of Matthew, but clearly here. So, God, we ask that You would open the eyes of our heart for each one of us personally and as an entire church to just glean, glean at the foot of the cross, to see the glorious cross and the glorious death of Christ in light of our lives, to see Your love poured out here on the cross of Christ for our sake.

[1:36] Lord, please, grow us deeper in understanding this now, we pray. Amen. Now, would you stand with me for the reading of God's Word?

Again, we are in Matthew chapter 27, verses 45 to 62. Now, from the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabakrani? This is my God, my God, why have You forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, this man is calling Elijah. And one of them at once ran to took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink.

But the other said, wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him. And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

[2:57] The tombs were also opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, truly, this was the Son of God.

There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock.

[4:05] And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite of the tomb. May the Lord add a blessing to the reading of his word.

A news outlet of a small town once reported two brothers who decide to play on mounded sandbanks formed by the dredging that keeps a river channel clear, dredging that pumps the sand from the bottom of the river out into big mounds along a river bank.

When the young boys were late for dinner and darkness filled the sky, a search began. One of the boys had stepped on a crust of sand hiding a large void formed by the dredging of the wet sand from the river bottom.

When the crust gave way, the boy fell, plunged into the deep, dark void with its sand walls collapsing in on him.

Everything went dark. Later, searchers found the young brother, unconscious, buried up to his shoulders in sand.

[5:27] And when he aroused through consciousness, rescuers frantically asked, where is your brother? The child replied, I'm standing upon his shoulders.

The older brother gave up his life so that the younger brother might live. We're all moved by stories like this, aren't we?

Hollywood wants to capture these stories and feed them to us. And we're captivated by stories like this. That greater love has no one than this.

That someone laid down his life for his friends. We all long for such love. And those who are followers of Jesus have all received such love.

Each one of you who have confessed Christ have received his love.

[6:38] Jesus died so that we might live. He was forsaken so that we might be forgiven and accepted. He bore the wrath of God so that we might receive the mercy of God.

So this passage before us is astounding. And just as last week, we saw the beginning of Christ's execution beginning through the perspective of those actively involved.

A battalion of Roman soldiers gathering to flog him, mock him, spit on him, and nailing him to the cross. Jewish leaders demanding for his death.

Gathering to watch his execution and their approval, reviling him and mocking him. Abandoned by his friends.

Abandoned by the ones that followed him. His disciples. Abandoned and rejected by all of humanity.

[7:47] So just when you thought, just when it might have not, couldn't get any darker than that. We arrive here in verse 45.

Matthew highlights a sudden change of scenery and zooms in, zooms in the lens on Jesus and Jesus' interaction on the cross.

Which brings us to our first point this morning. Christ was forsaken. In verses 45 through 50, we see Christ was forsaken.

Matthew tells us that the sixth hour, as Jesus hangs on the cross, darkness fills the sky and covers the land.

And this is no ordinary darkness. This darkness that descends comes in the middle of the day. The sixth hour, which is 12 noon, and lasts for three hours.

[8:48] When the sun is at its very peak, darkness descends and covers the land. You can't explain this away simply as some naturally occurring event.

You might ask, well, what about solar eclipses? Well, the Passover actually takes place on the very day of a full moon. And as we know, a solar eclipse can't happen on a full moon.

While everyone is expecting light, there is darkness. Darkness covering the land. And all of creation's light is being put out.

Darkness is descending. It's like creation is put into reverse. It's being undone. It actually takes us back to the beginning of time in Genesis chapter one, verses one through three.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void. And darkness was over the face of the deep.

[10:03] Creation begins with darkness, and it gives way to light. And God said, let there be light. And there was light. But here, there's darkness.

At the beginning of Matthew's gospel, Matthew kicks off Jesus' ministry with the reminder of God's promise to his people by quoting Isaiah 9, chapter 9, verse 2.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. And those who have dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shown.

Jesus enters into time, born as a baby. His life is marked as one with great light. The bright star that would lead the wise men from far from the east.

As they exceedingly rejoiced at its great appearing, knowing it would lead them to the king. The shepherds tending to their flock in the thick of darkness of the night.

[11:13] Suddenly, having a great light bursting forth around them, and as a choir of angels comes to announce the coming of the king.

Giving praise for his coming. The scriptures clearly point to Jesus' coming as the light of the world. Clearly, as the radiance of God's glory.

Now, at the sixth to ninth hour, when light, when light should be shining at its brightest, darkness, darkness, has covered the land.

And this darkness envelops over Christ. It envelops him as he bears the cross, as he is hanging there on the cross, which points to a greater spirituality.

Spiritual reality that is happening, signifying that something in the created order is terribly wrong. creation is becoming undone.

[12 : 21] There is a separation, a separation of how things were made to be. They are not as they are made to be right now. Men and women were made to be in right relationship with God.

Be union with God in perfect harmony. Christ, though, here, the light of the world is being snuffed out as darkness descends and God's judgment comes down.

But you ask, how can this be? How can the promised Messiah, the Christ, the King of the cosmos, publicly die like this? that the Son of God would be hanging on a tree?

This, my friends, was the plan of the Trinity, the Trinitarian plan from the beginning that Jesus Christ, the God-man, would become sin on our behalf.

He himself, the innocent one, would bear the full weight of God's just wrath, the penalty of rebellious sinners, you and me.

[13 : 42] But this is no mere physical penalty that he is taking, but it is a deeply spiritual penalty he is bearing. As he bears the weight of the sin of the whole world, here we see he is also forsaken.

forsaken, not just by anyone, not just by humans, not just by his friends around him, but he is forsaken by the Father, his heavenly Father.

And he now knows the complete separation. He knows the separation of God the Father. Out of this darkness, he lifts his voice.

is not a voice of creating, but is a cry of lament, a cry of being undone. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

To understand forsakenness, Michael Lawrence gives us this short little pithy statement that's very helpful. To be forsaken by God is to know the judicial stroke of eternal justice.

[15 : 03] To be forsaken by God is to know the judicial stroke of eternal justice. Deep in this darkness, in the final three hours of his life on the cross, Christ experienced this judicial stroke of eternal justice on our behalf.

He bore it all. Christ experienced hell here on the cross. The infinite wrath of the omnipotent God to the very last drop of that wrath.

As 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 21 helps us understand, for our sake, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When I was 12, my brother 15, my sister 16, my dad took us 12 hours away from home to visit my uncle.

I was a little confused. I didn't know why we were going so far away from home, just us, just the four of us. But as I was sitting alone in the backyard of my uncle's house, it dawned on me.

[16 : 31] I realized what was happening. My parents were getting a divorce and all of a sudden it's like darkness fell.

All of a sudden I felt all alone. more alone than I had ever felt before. But the reality was I wasn't utterly alone.

I still have my family inside. I still have my family. But have you ever experienced a time in your life when you felt utterly alone?

a taste maybe of what it feels like to be forsaken. Oh, friends, what it must have been like for the Son of God who has only known God's favor for eternity, from eternity's past.

Christ, this is my beloved Son, in whom is my delight, the words of the Father speaking over his Son. But yet now to be left to die on the cross alone by his Father.

[17 : 50] As Isaiah chapter 53 verse 10 says, it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief.

Oh, what it is to be put to grief by his own loving Father. But yet this is what we deserved.

This is what each and every one of you deserved. You and I, we deserve to be utterly forsaken by God. Oh, what a mystery.

What a mystery that it is that is going on here on the cross on our behalf. Where the Son of God, fully God, fully man, was forsaken by God the Father on our behalf.

But make no mistake here. Make no mistake. There is no rupture here happening between the triune God. The Trinity is still one here, working together in unison to secure our salvation.

[19:03] Oh, what a glorious truth. That the fullness of God would be on display to secure a great salvation for each and every one of us.

Yet we will never fully comprehend this love of God that is being poured out here on our behalf. Friends, I want to encourage you.

It's easy here in the moment, it's easy to minimize to minimize the anger of God, to do away with the wrath of God, to explain it away.

When someone asks you about the gospel, to just focus solely on the love of God, because we don't fully understand this mystery of what is going on here. Sometimes it feels scary to us when we think about this, we think about the wrath of God.

But I encourage you as you dwell on this moment, as you dwell on this scene, as you read the scriptures and you see them all pointing to this very moment, you will see that it is God's perfect love being poured out, God's perfect justice being poured out.

[20:23] In his wrath against sin, against sinners and their rebellion, we cannot, we cannot have the love of God without the justice of God.

God in his perfect justice must repay sinners for their rebellion. God would not be loving. if he did not pour out his wrath on the rebellious sinners of this world against sin. The bystanders here, as we see as we go into the next scene here, and as Jesus is crying out in his forsakenness, they hear him.

The bystanders in the darkness of the cross, they hear his cry and they actually think that this man is calling for the prophet Elijah. In verse 47, this man is calling for Elijah.

Let us see if he'll come down and save him. But as we recall earlier in Matthew, Elijah has already came. He came as John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus.

[21:35] So as they're waiting to see if Elijah comes, what happens next is not what they're expecting. In verse 50, we see that Jesus cries again.

He cried out in a loud voice and he yields up his spirit. He has been physically slaughtered up to this point with blood flowing freely from his body now.

He has endured the full divine judgment for sin. And here we are reminded that God is in full control every step of the way even in Christ's death.

From the moment of his going to the crucifixion, we see that Jesus lays down his life that he may take it up again.

No one takes it from him, he says, but he lays it down on his own accord. And he has the authority to pick it up again. This charge he has received from the Father.

[22:42] Christ willingly went to the cross with this purpose to lay down his life and love for us and love for the Father.

He went to the cross to enter into darkness, to enter into our darkness that we deserved. The darkness of death.

But yet, he did this that we might live. My friends, there is nothing outside of the control of God.

When it may seem that in times that evil is reigning in our day, that death is consuming.

Yet, when we look at this moment, we can trust in the sovereign plans and power of God to accomplish his purposes. That Christ goes before us and he overcomes the darkness of death by entering into that very darkness himself.

He does this to secure our forgiveness. That leads us to our second point. Christ secured our forgiveness.

[23:56] So as these bystanders witness this dramatic moment of Christ giving up his life on the cross, the unexpected happens.

At the same time, same moment of his death, they witness a divine cataclysmic event. A cataclysmic event not of physical standards but in the created cosmos, in the heavens and the earth, out of the darkness of the cross of Christ, burst forth divine power.

The veil being torn into the earth shaking, rocks being split, the dead being raised to life. In Gentiles, confession are all divine shockwaves bursting forth from the epicenter of the cross of Christ.

All of these, all of these are signs or evidence pointing to Christ, pointing to something being undone in the wake of his death. Something new being ushered in.

The first sign that Matthew draws to our attention in verse 51, and behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

[25 : 21] Christ said he would do this. Christ said he would destroy the temple and he would rebuild it in three days. In Matthew 24, as we saw, his death here was the beginning of the temple's destruction, causing the curtain of the temple to be torn to from top to bottom, something only of divine power could do.

Inside the temple, the design included multiple curtains, like layers to get to into the place where God's presence was to dwell.

and that last curtain, which I believe here that Matthew has in mind, that is also a symbolic reason that he has this in mind, that last curtain was a massive, thick curtain, like a partition, and behind it is where the very place God dwelt.

His very presence dwelt there. This was the holy of holies, a place only the high priest could enter into only once a year.

After making blood sacrifice for his own sins, he would enter in to make blood sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel. But now, that thick physical wall separating God and man was completely undone, ripped from top to bottom, torn in two.

[27 : 03] The temple is now empty and rendered obsolete, a sign not only of God opening up the heavens to his people, but it is yet a sign of judgment on the people of Israel and this temple, destroying the temple through his death.

God is creating and establishing a new covenant here between God and man where no broken temple system is needed, run by sinful men.

No more traveling to the temple to put forward our feeble sacrifices. no more restricted access to seek reconciliation with God because maybe you're a Gentile, you're poor, you're not able to travel to the temple, you're physically not able to go.

No. God here rips the curtain in two, opening the heavens, making salvation available to all peoples, to the ends of the earth.

This is the first fruits, the first fruits of the gospel being open, the gospel going forth to all nations.

And here Matthew helps us see that in each one of these signs here after the curtains torn.

[28 : 38] But most clearly and explicitly we see it here in the first fruits of a Gentile Roman's confession. A Roman centurion.

He just saw what took place. It says in verse 54, as he was keeping watch over Jesus, he saw the earthquake and what took place and they were filled with awe and said, truly, this was the Son of Man, the Son of God.

The author of Hebrews here helps us grasp the significance of the rendering of the veil even clearer here. In Hebrews chapter 9 verses 11 through 15 it says, but when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation, Christ entered once for all into the holy places, not by the means of blood and goats and calves, but by the means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

For at the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer sanctify for the purification of the flesh, oh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purifying our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Oh, friends, the old system could only cleanse our bodies. It was only sufficient enough to cleanse us outwardly of our sin, but this new covenant of Christ ushering in Christ's sacrifice on the cross cleanses us entirely from our sin, spiritual and physical, bringing us into the presence of God.

[30 : 57] Salvation here, my friends, now flows freely and abundantly through Christ. It is by him pouring out his blood and laying down his life on the cross that he has now secured the forgiveness of all of our sins.

And all of these signs here that we say, we see are evidences, are clear evidences of that reality, of that truth, of what is going on in the cosmic realm.

This, my friends, is the power of the cross of Christ. Friends, are you wracked with guilt over your own sin?

Are you burdened? Are you hiding sin in darkness? God, bring those sins into the light. Bring those sins into the light of confession and take heart. Take heart that your sins, all of them, are paid for on the cross of Christ.

[32 : 17] Bring your sins into the light and know the forgiveness of Christ. Matthew, though, doesn't stop there. We see the power of the cross sweeping through the lives of some unlikely people here. Some unlikely people who come to gather around Christ. Which brings us to our third and final point. Christ gathered the unlikely.

Psalm 22, which Jesus quotes on the cross when he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? In fulfillment of that, Psalm 22 mirrors the crucifixion.

As Christ is in anguish, David also in Psalm 22 is in anguish and suffering as he cries out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Enemies surrounding him.

Yet, it does not end there. It does not end in despair. It does not end in forsakenness.

[33 : 32] If you read Psalm 22, you'll trace it mirrors this crucifixion scene quite well. Pastor theologian Peter Leihart helpfully points out, Psalm 22 provides background for the crucifixion in other ways as well.

The Psalm is not only about David's deliverance from suffering, it also has a corporate dimension to it as well. David begins alone, attacked by enemies, but ends with brothers and friends gathered around him.

Christ was utterly alone in his crucifixion, forsaken by all on the cross, forsaken by his father, attacked and devoured by priestly bulls and Gentile dogs.

Yet, in the wake of Christ's death on the cross, we see God surround Christ's body with brothers, with those who fear God.

But he doesn't surround him with the ones you might expect. The twelve disciples closest to Jesus have been absent throughout the entire scene of Christ's crucifixion.

[34 : 58] But here, Matthew draws our attention to another different crew of individuals that surround Jesus.

us. We see in verses 55 through 61, we see a Roman centurion, we see the women who have followed Jesus from Galilee, and we see Joseph of Arimathea.

Yes, these characters, if we walk through it, these characters are also recorded to be recorded as eyewitnesses bearing testimony that they observed all that just occurred.

They observed Christ's death and the burial of his body. They were first-hand eyewitnesses.

However, I don't believe that Matthew just leaves us there.

I think Matthew wants us to see more here. He wants to connect more. He also wants to see that Jesus' death gathers those who have been far off and he now brings them near.

[36 : 12] The Roman centurion and his cohort of soldiers, Gentiles, who were once Gentile dogs far off from the presence of the Almighty God, have been brought near.

Women who have followed Jesus throughout his ministry, even sometimes on the fringes throughout Matthew's gospel, and yet in this time and culture, they were not regarded highly. They are here made a central part of his very story as they care and watch over Jesus in his death. Joseph of Arimathea, the gospel writers, John and Luke and their gospel accounts, give us further insights into who Joseph of Arimathea is.

He is a secret disciple who has followed Jesus from a distance for fear of the Jews. Why? For he was a part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council of leaders, and he was a rich man as well.

[37 : 25] Matthew, in a small way here, is reminding us that God's redemptive plan through the cross of Christ has the power to transform the lives of the unlikely, to include the lives of the unlikely into his redemptive plan.

Those who are in the background now are made central figures here in his redemptive plan. Oh, how encouraging is that?

Those that have been in the background are now central figures in his redemptive plan. Recall with me in Matthew chapter 8 verses 5 through 13, the centurion who came to Jesus to hear his paralyzed servant, in which Jesus responds, no one in Israel have I found such faith.

Or the woman who pours expensive ointment on Christ, upon his head he douses her in a full flask of ointment.

man. And Jesus says, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. But now here is a Jewish leader of the High Sanhedrin Council

being transformed by what just transpired.

[39:01] God. He has given boldness and courage to step out from hiding in the shadows now and into the light.

As Matthew puts it in verse 57 through 58, when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph who also was a disciple of Jesus.

He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. The first time we see someone publicly identifying himself with Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea first time publicly identifying himself, stepping out from the shadows, going to Pilate in boldness.

To do what? To ask for the body of Christ so that he can give Christ a proper burial and put his body in his own newly carved tomb.

Now this would have been a little unusual, a rather unusual request for Pilate to receive as typically those who hung on the cross were left, who were left there after their death to hang in shame, left there to rot.

[40:23] But here we see a glimpse of God's loving kindness for his son, that he calls this unlikely Jewish leader, a member of the very council that put Jesus to death, to care for the body of Christ and to give him a proper burial.

Brothers and sisters, how amazing is the love of our God here that we see being poured out at the death, at the cross of Christ, transforming lives of those around him.

So I might ask, how is the cross of Christ transforming your lives today? Are you trusting in the power of Christ?

Are you trusting in the power of Christ to give you courage to publicly step up and identify with him? Because you love him, because you know his love.

And you want to share the good news of Christ's sacrifice, who are those that are maybe the unlikely in your lives, the unlikely to come to Christ.

[41:51] Do you trust in Christ to save those that are unlikely? So friends, do not pass quickly by the cross of Christ.

let it transform you. Let it transform every part of your life. We as Christians, brothers and sisters, should linger in the cross of Christ.

We should linger at the foot in its shadow and be amazed at the complexity of the mystery and the wonder and the awe of love of God being poured out here.

The older brother that we heard about at the beginning in the introduction, the older brother that jumped down into the deep dark pit as the walls of sand came crashing down.

He jumped in to lay down his life so his younger brother might live. And as you can imagine, in that moment, the younger brother knew and experienced the immense love his brother had for him.

[43:15] That this love then would transform his life forever. Have you known this?

Some of you in here maybe are not Christians. So I ask, have you known and experienced the love of Christ that lays down his life for you so that you would be freed from the just penalty of your sin, eternal death?

when you know this and when you experience this love of Christ, when you trust in his finished work, when you cast yourselves upon his shoulders, his shoulders are broad and they are a firm foundation for all, a firm foundation for us to stand on for our eternal life.

So I invite you, cast yourself upon his shoulders. When you stand upon his shoulders, I just want to read this passage from Romans chapter 8.

This is what God says, when you stand upon the shoulders of Christ, what shall we then say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

[44:48] He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all? Oh, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against his elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died.

More than that, who was raised. And who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from this love of Christ?

Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake, we are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. know in all these things we are more than conquerors to him who loved us. For I am sure that neither life nor death nor angels nor rulers nor things

present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth or anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[46 : 16] my friends look look with me and gaze at the cross of Christ and find the forgiveness of your sins your redemption!

Your forgiveness secured! This is where the love of God is on full display! This is where the power of God the assurance of God the comfort of God the glory of God the mercy of God the grace of God flows abundantly and freely for all for all who trust in Christ's death for your sins!

Let us pray. Father we thank you we thank you for your word we thank you for fully revealing your glory at the cross of Christ making your love known to us extending forgiveness and eternal life oh Lord I pray that we would cast ourselves upon this love and know this deep love of Jesus I pray amen away