

# Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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10/20/24

**Sermon Title:** Finished

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 27:45-54

**Matt. 27:45 ¶** Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

**Matt. 27:46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

**Matt. 27:47** And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.”

**Matt. 27:48** And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.

**Matt. 27:49** But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.”

**Matt. 27:50** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

**Matt. 27:51 ¶** And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.

**Matt. 27:52** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised,

**Matt. 27:53** and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

**Matt. 27:54** 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!”

**Main Point:** Christ died for the ungodly, that he might bring us to God.

**Outline:**

1. Forsaken (27:45-46)
2. Finished (27:47-54)

**Introduction**

The NY Times has an obituary from a few months ago for a man named Adolfo Kaminsky, who saved the lives of thousands of Jews as a forger and part of the French Resistance during World War 2. I want you to listen to this passage from his obituary:

“Kaminsky’s talent was as banal as could be: He knew how to remove supposedly indelible blue ink from paper. He had learned how to remove such stains as a teenager working for a clothes dyer and dry cleaner in his Normandy town. When he joined the anti-Nazi resistance at 18, his expertise enabled him to erase Jewish-sounding names like Abraham or Isaac that were officially inscribed on French ID and food ration cards, and substitute them with typically gentile-sounding ones. The forged documents allowed Jewish children, their parents and others to escape deportation to Auschwitz and other concentration camps, and in many cases to flee Nazi-occupied territory for safe havens. At one point, Mr. Kaminsky was asked to produce 900 birth and baptismal certificates and ration cards for 300 Jewish children in institutional homes who were about to be rounded up. The aim was to deceive the Germans until the children could be smuggled out to rural families or convents, or to Switzerland and Spain. He was given three days to finish the assignment. He toiled for two straight days, forcing himself to stay awake by telling himself: ‘In one hour I can make 30 blank documents. If I sleep for an hour 30 people will die.’”

On the one hand, I cannot help but think: what a terrible burden to bear, knowing that the survival of so many would depend on staying awake, fighting for every moment, each hour 30 lives being saved. But here is a man who is driven by

purpose and by what he knows: he is driven by a conviction that lives are on the line. His staying awake – his suffering – is for a purpose. That many would be kept alive.

I could not help but think of today's passage when I read that obituary. This man who saved the lives of so many gives us a passing and faint picture of our Lord. Kaminsky pales in comparison to Christ, of course.

Because today's passage takes us to the darkest, most feared, most horrible moment in the life of our Savior: the moment of his abandonment, of his greatest pain, and of his death. It is also the central event in all of human history and is the culmination of all the promises, all the types and shadows, all the ceremonies that God had given to mankind leading up to this moment. It's the fulfillment of the first promise God ever made to fallen humanity: that the head of the serpent would *finally* be crushed.

This is another way of saying: we cannot do this moment justice here today, but we can bear witness to it. There are riches here; more than I'm capable of scooping up and giving you today. More than can fill all the books in the world. But still we can be faithful and witness Christ here today. I want to look at what we might think of as two parts to today's text. First, forsaken. Second: finished.

## **1. Forsaken (27:45-46)**

First, we come to what might be one of the most challenging passages in all of Scripture: the moment when Christ is forsaken. We see this in verse 45:

“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, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?””

This moment is just part of what has been a whole series of devastating sufferings dealt against the son of God. In fact, the theological word we use for this is “humiliation.” Christ renounced his rights as God and became a man. That's the beginning of his humiliation. He lived in a fallen world. That was part of his humiliation. He was hated and rejected even though he was good and righteous:

humiliation. All of his life has been a long line of increasing humiliations from that exalted state which was rightly his in the beginning.

And then here today, we have the final humiliation as he hangs, nailed to the tree, naked, humiliated, a spectacle for all to see, as he dies in shame among the worst of sinners. And it's as though the world itself responds and convulses in reaction to what is happening.

The sky itself darkens. And as the darkness of the sky, so with Christ's own soul. Where he once found sweet fellowship by going to the Father in prayer, he now receives no peace, affirmation, or comfort. He expresses what is called by theologians the cry of dereliction – arising from some mysterious experience that you and I can scarcely comprehend.

Here is what is so mysterious about it: Jesus Christ is of the same essence – the same nature – as the Father. He is one with the Father. He is God and never ceases to be God. And yet in this cry we see something. We see Christ taking his words here from Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Those were David's words. Now *Christ* is David, crying out from the pit of suffering. Just like David wept from his loneliness, Christ here has become David. This is not a cry of triumph: “Why have you forsaken me?”

All the covenant curses are being visited upon this man. Jesus in this moment could rightly pray with Psalm 89:38, “But now you have cast off and rejected; you are full of wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.”

“Why have you forsaken me?”

There is a question here. Unanswered in Jesus' own mind. Something he in his humanity does not know: “why?” “WHY?” “Why do I feel alone right now?” “I've never been alone ever in all my life. Why do I now feel abandoned?”

He was forsaken by everyone. But up to now, the Father had never abandoned him. Though everyone – even his own disciples would abandon him, he *always* knew he could turn to the Father in prayer. He's been praying to him all his life. He has been praying without ceasing this entire time on the cross. He never stopped. Yet now he cries out... and nothing. He looks up. An empty sky. No answer. He

looks and no longer sees the smiling face of his Father. That sweet unity he always knew... somehow it's broken. "How?" "Why?" "Why? I've never sinned." "Why? I've only ever pleased you." "Why? I don't deserve this! This isn't justice!"

On this day, it isn't just that a man is dying: a sacrifice is being made. If there could have been any other way, it would have been done.

"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Is 53:5).

"Why?"

"It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief" (Is 53:10).

"Why?"

"Out of the anguish of his *soul*...shall the righteous one...make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities" (Is. 53:11). His sufferings were not merely physical. It is his *soul* in anguish in this moment.

"Why?"

The promise was made, that the head of the serpent would be crushed. In order to crush the serpent, the son also had to be crushed.

"Why?"

"The son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). And here it is happening, in the moment we hear his final cry: "Why have you forsaken me?"

## **2. Finished (27:47-54)**

Our second point today from this passage is "Finished."

After Christ's cry of dereliction, there is a moment of misunderstanding for the observers. Those at the foot of the cross hear his cry and think he is calling for Elijah. They try to get him to drink sour wine – the purpose of which is to numb his pain as he dies. But we see this in verse 50: "Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit."

If you read the early church fathers, one common theme when they discuss this verse is that even in his death, he has the power for things to be otherwise. When Chrysostom is discussing this verse for example, he cannot help but think of John 10:18, “I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again. I lay it down of myself.”

Even as he yields his spirit, it is *he* who does it. Not these men. Not these people standing around who think they have power. Because at any point he could have reversed things. It was always in his power to call legions of angels from his father, and yet he yielded his life. “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”

In this sense, the Scottish minister Hugh Martin describes Christ as choosing not to draw “on his divine might and energies, but denying himself their exercise... withdrawing from the field of action those prerogatives and powers of Deity, which in the twinkling of an eye might have scattered ten thousand worlds and hells of enemies” (*Shadow of Calvary*, 26).

He dies willingly, redeeming the church with his blood. Though he is the lamb of God, he dies like a lion. It is *he* who yields his spirit. And he does it for us.

Earlier we mentioned Jesus’ question: “Why?” Do you know the answer? It’s here in the tearing of the curtain. Because of course in this moment, the curtain of the temple is being torn forever. The dividing line between God and his people is being ripped down. But that requires a sacrifice.

Think of this: God’s perfect son. All he *ever* did was please the Father. All he ever did was constantly deserve and live in the benediction of the Father: “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you.” He lived his life looking to his Father and being looked by the Father full in the face.

But now? The curtain was torn, and people were raised, and the captives were set free precisely because instead of the benediction, Christ received the malediction:

Instead of “the Lord bless you and keep you,” Jesus heard, “The Lord curse you and strike you. The Lord turn his face from you and administer his justice for sin upon you. The Lord turn away his countenance and give you no peace.” That is what the Lord Jesus heard in that moment.

The son. Treated like an atheist. Like a denier. Like a hater of God and a rebel. Treated like a lawbreaker and an enemy. The only one who ever pleased him completely becomes the source of his absolute displeasure. “Why?” “Why?” he cries.

You may find the cross mysterious. But in the moment when he experiences it, Christ seems not to see it clearly for himself, either. A drowning person doesn't understand water better just because he is drowning in it. Such it was with Jesus: “Why?”

And yet the answer, at least in part? “For us.” Death for Jesus means life for us, if we'll trust in him. If we will, then God will let *his* death stand for the one *we* deserve.

## Conclusion

A lot of people are afraid of death. Perhaps you feel the same. Isn't there something here for us today to answer that fear?

Christ does something to that fear when we place our faith in him... when we rest in him... when we trust in his death to lift the sentence of guilt from us, it transforms death. Yes, death is still unnatural and evil and ugly. But now, in the shadow of the cross, it's changed.

The language Paul uses is that Christ removes the “sting” of death. He doesn't remove *death*. But he does transform it. Why? Because he walked that path already. He's faced death already. That place we fear to go? He's been there already, in the place of his own people whom he loves. That bridge that we fear to cross... that moment that so many dread... you see he has crossed it first. He has faced that thing that we should otherwise fear. He's faced it first. He experienced it first. And in him we have nothing to fear, because he faced it for us.

Listen to F.B. Meyer reflect upon what it means to have the death of Jesus as ours:

“Death is abolished! The wasp struck its sting into the cross of the dying Lord, and lost it there, and is now stingless forever. The poison fang of the viper has been extracted, Goliath beheaded by his own sword. The teeth of the

lion have been drawn. And for this reason the apostles always speak of a believer's death as being but a sleep.

Death is not to be more dreaded than sleep, its twin. In all likelihood we shall be quite surprised when we have passed through the dark portal, that was so slight and easy an experience. We dread it now, because we do not really believe that Christ's death has made it all so different. If we believed this, it would give us great confidence. But whether we believed or not, we shall find it so.

A step; a moment; a passage across the Bridge of Sighs; a transition from darkness to light; a birth — that is all. Absent from the body, present with the Lord. No moment of unconsciousness or oblivion! The veil rent, the shell broken, the iron gateway passed whilst the light and air of the eternal morning break on the emancipated spirit!" (Quoted by Tim Challies)

Christian, do you understand what we've witnessed here in this event in this passage today? It's nothing less than the death of our sin. The death of our death. The one who hung there hung in our place. The one who suffered, suffered in our place.

Richard Sibbes reminds us, "Christ overcame sin, death, God's wrath, and all for me; in him I triumph over all these. What welcome news is this to a distressed sinner! Whenever your soul is truly humbled in the sense of sin, look not at your own conscience, but at Christ. If you are a brokenhearted sinner, see your sins in Christ your Savior taken away" (Sibbes, *Christ's Suffering for Man's Sins*).

If you're here and you're not a Christian yet, I want you to know, you find the answer to your search here, at the cross. That dread that you have when you think of your life and the end of it all... Jesus Christ gives the answer here. The troubled conscience, and the knowledge that one day you will have to answer for your life... it's answered here if you're open to it. And the answer is, come to him, and he'll be your sacrifice. Come to him, and he'll be your life. Come to him, and you'll find that he's died your death. Isaiah 1:18:



“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

This is what God was teaching the Hebrew people for a thousand years before Jesus came: we all have sinned. And he will forgive those who come to him and repent. Everything needed has been accomplished, and we are witnesses of that here today.

*Let's pray.*