

# The Sufferings of the Cross

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Now we don't observe days, but we can take advantage of them. Today is Good Friday and we're thinking about the cross of Christ all over the world. And I want to speak to you about the cross. 1 Corinthians 1:18. Those great words: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but unto us who are being saved, it is the power of God." You know how the cross of Christ is emphasized in the Scriptures. The great verses - we know when Paul reminds the Corinthians about the Gospel that he brought to them. He says first of all, I spoke to you about Jesus Christ and Him crucified, that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures and that He was buried and He rose again the third day. That's my priority when I came to call you. I was determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He says God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ my Lord. He loved me and gave Himself for me.

It's a strange aspect of the Gospel that a third of them deal with one week in the life of our Lord - the last week. Well, let's say now that there are 520 weeks in 10 years and that would be 1560 weeks in thirty years. And then you add another, say, 115 weeks. If we do the sums, all those years of Jesus in His 20's - we know nothing about those weeks, what He did. But we know a third of Matthew and Mark and Luke and John tell us about one week, and it's the last week - the last week in the life of our Lord Jesus. And then there are the ordinances. There are two. There's the Lord's Supper. The bread representing the broken body of our Lord, and the wine His shed blood. There's baptism. That we are baptized in union with Him into His death and into His resurrection from the grave.

And there are the great hymns. We've sung some of them. When I survey the wondrous cross... In the cross of Christ I glory... There's a fountain filled with blood... Alas, and did my Savior bleed... O, Sacred Head now wounded... There's a green hill far away where the dear Lord was crucified and died to save us all... That's the power of the cross. And then there are the wonderful books by Stott and (unintelligible) and Krummacher and Martyn and Murray. One that's a favorite of mine by Donald McCloud - "Christ Crucified." And I owe him so much and what I'm to say to you tonight is what he's taught me.

So here are the great emphases on what Paul calls the folly of the cross. It seems to me that it's so easy for us to talk of the cross in passing; to take Calvary in our stride; to live very close to the doctrine and the Gospel records of the cross, and yet feel so little of the overwhelming emotional power. When I survey the wondrous cross. Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me? And the problem is for us the cross seems so logical. It seems so reasonable. It seems that we've lived from our childhood until this moment with the reality of the green hill far away. And we've never stumbled across it with just a breathtaking sense of discovery. And that is one of the keys to experiencing anew the glory of what our brave young Savior did for us. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who digs a hole in the field and he's burying something. His blade strikes something and he clears it away. There's a chest and

he opens it and gold and silver and pearls and diamonds and rubies and tiaras and crowns - he's found treasure.

The problem is we've never seen the paradox. We've never seen the ugliness. We've never seen the absurdity. What Paul calls the sheer folly of the cross. And in what does that folly reside? Where is the paradox? Where is the absurdity? Well, it's very plain isn't it? It's the marvelous bringing together of this Person with this cross. This Person is the brightness of God's glory. He is the express image of His Person. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and higher than the heavens. He is the express image of God. He says, "I and My Father are one." He is the one by whom God made the worlds. That He should be crucified; that He who sits at God's right hand should be crucified; that God should crucify His own Son; that He should crucify the one who knew no sin; the one who is Lord and God of all; that He should crucify Immanuel, God with us.

And in many ways this is the question to which the New Testament is providing the answer. What right did God have to crucify His Son? What did God hope to achieve by enacting this absurdity? This crucifixion of His sinless Boy. Why was Christ made a curse? Why did the anathema of God lie on His beloved Son? And the way into this then to find the answer is to plumb some of the depths of this curse, this anathema, that Christ bore. And the answer to our query is that Christ was made to bear all that our sin deserves - the whole wrath of God against our sin, the whole recoil of God against all that contradicts His nature and His being and His attributes. Christ received the wages of sin. And this involved in a fourfold suffering on Christ's part.

### **Jesus Experienced Physical Suffering**

Firstly, the curse involved the Lord's physical suffering. There was a body prepared for the Savior. It was a body prepared for Him by God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a body identical in every aspect with our bodies. It had the same kind of nervous system. It had the same kind of exquisite sensitivity to pain. There was no built-in analgesic or painkiller that God provided for His Son. It was a body that was dependent on nutrients and on sleep and on exercise. It was a body that had physical limitations as to energy and so on. It was vulnerable to exhaustion and weariness. And in that body, Christ suffered. His body was a part of the holocaust. Now we are called upon to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. That's our spiritual worship, our reasonable service. And so Christ suffered carrying our sins in His own body on the cross. And in that body He knew hunger and He knew thirst. He had to ask someone, "Can you give me a drink?" In that body, He knew physical exhaustion. In that body, He experienced extreme pain on Golgotha. All that was involved in being beaten up by the squad of soldiers, the scourging. All that was involved in the attachment with the sledgehammer and great nails in His hands and feet to the cross. All that it meant - the suspension of His body on the cross hour after hour. The dehydration by the effects of the sun beating down on Him. And last, the humiliation of the body and the ultimate experience of death and dissolution. It's often said that there is no description of crucifixion in the New Testament. But it wasn't necessary, you see, because it was such a common sight outside the walls of Jerusalem in every major city, on the crossroads, wherever Rome was. The warning to criminals that this will be your fate if you defy us. It seems to me that one of the great comforts then that we have as

we ourselves face the reality of physical pain in our own lives is to know that the Lord knows and the Lord understands. So whatever the extreme of our own agony may be, we could never scream to the heavens that we're going into places where He's never been; or we are taking a journey that He's never traversed. Because He has. He's been there. He's known the pain and far worse. So we sin. We sin in our bodies. Our fingers sin. Our eyes sin. Our lips, our tongues. Our emotions. And He suffered in His body because He loved us. That's what kept Him there. He wouldn't undo the enfleshment. And He wouldn't come down. So there was our Lord's physical sufferings.

### **Jesus Experienced Emotional Suffering**

Secondly, our Lord experienced emotional pain. He had a human soul and a human spirit. He had true human psychology. And in that psychology as a man, He suffered emotionally. I know it's possible to present this in an utterly unbalanced way. I think too much is made of the claim that Christ is said to have wept but never said to have smiled or to have laughed. You bear in mind that the fruit of the Spirit is joy. You bear in mind that the constant emphasis in the New Testament is that rejoicing is the common emotion of everyone who is born from above. It's an indispensable mark then of our Lord's authentic humanness that He was a profoundly contented person; that He rejoiced in the Spirit we are told; that He was happy because He could say "I delight to do Thy will, O Lord." Notwithstanding all the deprivation of His earthly existence and sin-bearing. He was a man, I believe, who knew great heights of joy and delight in the will of God. There was in His heart melody every day to the Lord.

And we can emphasize that more firmly because despondency and depression are normally violations of God's will for His people. They're often sinful manifestations of our own human egocentricity. Christ therefore I say rejoiced. Christ knew contentment. He knew the most elevated and pure and profound happiness in the depths of His heart. And yet having said that, it's most wondrously evident in the New Testament that Christ also knew the depths of disconsolateness and despondency and human sorrow. We find Him at the grave of Lazarus and this family that He loved - the brother and the two sisters - He'd go stay with them. He's there and He sees them brokenhearted and He weeps too. And I think it's marvelous! It's marvelous because today we are told by some strange people that it's a weakness of faith to sorrow. And I'm saying that sorrowing in bereavement has a great mandate in the Word of God, in the suffering of the Savior, and in His sorrow at the grave of Lazarus. And when death separates us from loved ones - separates us temporarily, but devastatingly - then we have the right from our Lord's own example, we have the right then to weep. We are told by Paul that we're not to sorrow as those who have no hope, but we're not told not to sorrow. In fact, we find in the New Testament that after Stephen had been viciously stoned to death, that righteous men came and carried him to clean him and bury him with great lamentation we are told. It's a divine accommodation to our frailty. It's the right to sorrow, the right to weep.

And it's imperative in every experience of bereavement that when we pastors and church leaders and women friends go into the home where there's been a bereavement, that we encourage in every way the sorrow and the tears and pass the box of Kleenex around and weep with them. We weren't intended to go through the valley of the shadow as if we were stones; as if we were stoics. Jesus Christ the Son of God wept. He looked at the city of Jerusalem

(unintelligible). And we're told when He looked that He just cried. We're told that He wailed over it because the sorrow was so desolating when the Lord saw the hardness of their hearts and their refusal to come to Him. He would have spread His wings over them and protected them from the hawk of Satan. And they wouldn't come. They didn't want to. They were spiritually obstinate. And He just cried aloud. And we have the same mandate there when we pray. Some will weep as they pray with us because of the desolation of their own providence and our own society.

But then there's a deeper way in which our Lord wept, isn't there? And we go with Him, we're invited with Him to go into Gethsemane. And there He confesses that His soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. We hear Him say He is sore amazed and very heavy, that He is very despondent. And I feel that as Christ contemplated the reality of Calvary that He was amazed as He contemplated the next day, what was going to happen, He was emotionally overboard. He couldn't just take it in His stride. There was an evilness for Him. The Father gave Him the cup and He looked into that cup. And there are times when the cup God gives us fills us with amazement.

How faithless I would be to the Lord who called me to be a preacher of His Word if I were to pretend that the life of the believer was always easy, always manageable, always one in which we have triumphant victories, one after another, they all fall down before us. Because we know that our road is eventful and our road can be difficult. And our road can be full of things that just take our breath away. The Psalmist says to God, "Thou hast given us the wine of astonishment to drink." It's almost: You made us drunk. I'm just reeling at what I've heard. Just what's happened - I'm staggering. I'm at my wit's end. And there are some of you here who would know moments of that kind, moments that seem to distance us from all that we believe about a loving God that we can trust with all our hearts and He will give us all the delight of our hearts as we trust in Him. I am saying to you your Savior knew the kind of amazement that you as one who trusts in the same God that He trusted in, the sort of wonder: I can't manage this. I can't handle this. It's just too much for me. I can't cope in the weakness of my humanness. Christ full of sorrow, Christ full of amazement, Christ full of fear as He contemplates the reality of Golgotha. He was sore amazed and very heavy. My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death.

I don't believe that the cup was given to Him simply for the Lord to take it in His stride and quaff it down and carry on. I believe our Lord was totally reconciled to the will of God for Him. I believe He went to Calvary willingly. But behind that contentment and behind that receiving and submission to God's will there was a mighty struggle. He had to struggle to bring His created humanness into submission to the will of God. And I see nothing unworthy. I see nothing sinful in the way some of you have lost children and husbands and wives and have known great, great heartache and have felt the pain and the anguish. Could you cope with it? It's perfectly natural. It was for our Lord only a tribute to the accuracy of His own insight into the awesomeness of the righteousness and justice of Almighty God. And so the Lord went through all these emotions - emotions of sorrow and amazement and fear. That emotional pain. All that was part of the anathema, of the curse that came upon Him. He was sorrowful even unto death. So we have physical pain, and we have emotional pain.

### **Jesus Experienced Relational Suffering**

Thirdly, we have social pain. I mean by that that Christ suffered in His relationships. Alright, we go back and we see that man is made in the image of God. And that the God in whose image we are made is a triune God. He doesn't simply exist as one, but He exists as three Persons in one God - a God who always exists in relationships. That vision we are given by John in the opening words of the first chapter of his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." So in the beginning there was God with God. That marvelous reality in the glory of His unity. So in God there is always with-ness. In the real God, the only God, there is. There is always togetherness. There's never loneliness with God. He didn't need to create because He was lonely. He was never in isolation. There is always love in God. There is an object of His love, a recipient of His love, and He receives love in return. There was never a more loving Father. There was never a more loved Son or loving Son. It's impossible for a monad like Allah - for one being - someone who lives in undifferentiated isolation, it's impossible for him to love. There's nothing to love. But in God, there's always with-ness. There's dynamism. There is fellowship. There is communion in God.

And when God made man, He made man in His own image. He made him for community. The Word was made flesh. He made him for fellowship, for with-ness. And a man must find that need fulfilled in his fellowship with God at one great level. God walked in the garden. God came and Adam came to Him. He walked with me and He talked with me and He told me I was His own. And the joys we shared as we tarried there no one will ever know. Adam and Eve could have sung that together. God spoke to man. He spoke familiarly. How are things today, Adam? What have you seen? What have you done today? And in that vertical relationship, man has fellowship with God. Man has with-ness with God. And yet, this, God says, it's not good for man to be alone. I will give him a helpmeet for him. And so God provided therefore for man's social needs. He provided a wife. He provided a family to meet man's needs for togetherness. With his own kind, it's a glorious thing. That when Jesus Christ became a man, He became a man in the image of God. And in the image of God's togetherness, in the image of God's with-ness. And Christ's need for fellowship found marvelous fulfillment of course in His relationship with God, in those wonderful conversations - getting up early and having a time of delight and communion with His Father, prayers that He offered to His Father. He went as the only begotten Son through the veil into the most holy place and He went with boldness. He spoke with God and He found delight. "Who would not rise early to meet such company?" He could say as McCheyne said.

But there is something more glorious still. That even in Christ there was a social instinct. There was a need for fellowship that could not find its exhausted fulfillment in His fellowship with God. I read He chose twelve. And I might say yes, He chose twelve to instruct them. And He chose twelve to commission them and send them forth as (unintelligible) His ambassadors. But I don't find that in Scripture. I find that He chose twelve to be with Him. And there are few things in the New Testament that are more glorious than that. That the Word who became flesh who was with God and was God chose men to be His companions and His friends. It speaks eloquently of the reality of His incarnation, the reality of His humanness. That He was no loner.

The contrast with John the Baptist is so pervasive in those opening chapters. John there dressed in camel's hair and a robe he's roughly made and cut a strip of a carcass as a belt. He's

living on honey and locusts. And Jesus goes to weddings. He goes to parties and feasts. He goes into people's homes and He speaks to them. He talks with them. There was a need. There was an isolation that could only be met in togetherness with bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. He had laid hold of the seed of Abraham. He had assumed flesh and blood. And He took the reality of being flesh and blood and He chose twelve to be with Him. And then as the end is near, as He sets His face steadfastly to Jerusalem, He is more conscious of them. And He withdraws from Galilee and He withdraws from preaching in the open air, in the temple. He sees less and less of the world and the public, and He says oh, I'm so looking forward to our meal together. He spends that last night in the upper room and He speaks to them. They have their head on His bosom because they love Him so much. He goes from that upper room into His final experience at Gethsemane and He says "oh, you'll come, Peter. And John, James, you'll come with Me." And do you think it was only to observe? Do you think it was only to report? Do you think it was only that they might learn some great spiritual lesson? He says come and watch with Me. Come and watch with Me.

You say to someone, pray for me, pastor. Pray for me now, will you? And the Son of God sought someone to bear His burdens and share His oppression and watch with Him so that at this desperate time of deep darkness, there would be somebody there walking with Him. And it's at that point then that the curse comes - the curse of social deprivation. Because He comes across the meadow and there they are snoring. Couldn't you watch with Me for an hour? You said though I should die with You, you should never forsake Me at all. Never that marvelous word of the orator, of the rhetorician - the marvelous word of the tool of human oratory. "Never." I'll never let you down. You let Me down, didn't you? Then they all run off as they see the torches and the breaking of the branches as they come through the trees with their swords and staves and they run for their lives. All their protestations - they agreed with Peter, "You can count on us." And then as He's being led away, He hears Peter and a girl saying, "Aren't you with Him?" "Don't you have a Galilean accent?" And this heroic, steadfast believer says, "I never knew that blasted Man. Never knew. No, not me." And He's alone. Absolutely alone. The time when He most needed sympathy. When He most needed someone to listen, a flicker, a catching of His eye, and saying in a glance, "I know why You're there." "I know why You're dying for me." "I know why You won't come down from the cross." "I know it." "We appreciate so much what You're doing." No one. He treads the winepress.

And all the people, there is none with Him. He's just by Himself. He's an object of contempt to the soldiers. He's an object of contempt to the Pharisees. The chief priests come down and they mock Him. He's an object of heartbroken sorrow to His mother and the women there. And He's a disappointment. He's a failure - another failed prophet to His disciples. They all left Him. Do you know there are Christians and they've borne a brave testimony to the Word of God, and because they've had a prophetic ministry, then they've known what it is to be misunderstood and maligned and their words twisted. And they've been forsaken by people that they thought were standing with them. They've had false accusations made and their motives have been twisted.

Come to Calvary, come with me. Come to your blessed Savior and see Him there and the comfort that He offers to you. Because He's been there where you are. (unintelligible) You've never been totally rejected, have you? You've had a concerned wife who's come in and

hugged you. You've had your mother on the phone. "Are you alright?" She's filled with concern. You've had brethren come. "We'll be praying for you all the time, pastor." There's been some faint voice - there's been a voice of your own integrity. You look through it, and everything we do, we could do better. But you knew you had to take that stand. You knew that had to be said. Jesus - utterly alone. And if you feel that yours has been a lonely ministry, that your universe is empty, that your world has collapsed, stand close by the Man of Calvary because there is ultimate and there is total and unqualified repudiation. There is no one who knows. Every other martyr had his supporters. They waited there as the cart came along and their beloved teacher was taken off and was bound in chain to the stake. And they cried to him and they shouted verses out. They sang together that they could hear. And he had the comfort of preaching perhaps and hurling defiance at those that were accusing him. And then the Lord in His compassion has a man - a criminal - and he's there and he's nailed alongside Jesus. And he speaks to Him. "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom." I expect that long before our Lord entered His final agony, that this man had lost any capacity of speaking, of giving a verse, of praying, of helping Jesus in any way. So, I am saying to you, we are looking at the cross and the curse, the anathema that He bore. And I'm saying firstly, it was physical pain. Secondly, it was emotional pain. And thirdly, it was social pain.

### **Jesus Experienced Spiritual Suffering**

And then last of all, our Lord experienced spiritual pain. Now, we can look at that two ways. Firstly, how He was exposed to Satanic onslaught. It was the hour of the power of darkness. And the devil threw his own blazing arrows, his incendiaries into the heart of the Savior - the incendiaries of doubt, the incendiaries of blasphemy, the incendiaries of despair. I do not say, I would not allow that they caused any conflagration, that they found in Christ then no moral or spiritually combustible material that they could set fire to. He was from His heart loving God with all the atoms and subatomic particles of His soul. But the pain was there and the darkness was there. It was the valley of the shadow of death. It was the hour of the authority of darkness. There's that marvelous picture in Colossians 2. We're told that Christ has delivered us from the power of darkness, and God's translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. He disarmed the principalities and powers. He made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross. So He made an incursion into the kingdom of darkness, into the authority of the darkness of Satan and Christ went into that kingdom. It was almost to use today's picture, (unintelligible). A commando raid. And Christ rescued us and Christ was used by this tremendous rescue operation that God had planned in eternity and set up and now orchestrates. He comes into the kingdom of darkness, into the authority of darkness. He is made vulnerable to its power and He is attacked and He is assaulted by Satan's doubts and Satan's blasphemous thoughts and Satan's attempts to bring our Lord not only to despondency, but to despair. And end the enfleshment and call for the legion of angels before His redemptive work is over and whisk Him away from our salvation. An onslaught. So Satan lifts the lid of the bottomless pit and he summons every demon out. And his command then to them all is that they go to Golgotha and they descend like a huge swarm of hornets. And they descend on our Lord and they attack Him and He is vulnerable and He is in terrible spiritual anguish because of

the power of darkness. And that is one cause of the spiritual pain that our Lord endured on the cross.

And then secondly, the terrible thing was the dereliction: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And that was the final manifestation of God's anathema. God putting a gulf between Himself and His Son. It meant on one level the loss of assurance of God's love, the loss of a sense of God's assistance. I don't believe that God ever stopped loving Him or ever ceased to help Him. The great prophecy was: "Behold, My Servant whom I uphold." And I believe that God was upholding Him in the garden, and upholding Him under the lash, and upholding Him when He stumbled carrying the cross, and upholding Him when the nails were driven through His hands and feet, and He was there. It was through the eternal Spirit that He offered Himself without spot to God. But I do believe that our beloved Savior wasn't conscious of the Father upholding Him or the Spirit ministering to Him.

And that can be a parable for some of the anguish that some of you have suffered. There are times when God is there, God is your refuge, God is your strength, God is a very real help in a day of great trouble, but you're not conscious that He's there. You don't appreciate that God is with you when you feel absolutely alone and the heavens seem as brass above you. And you lack the comfort of His presence and the sense of it. I don't believe He ever lost the Father's love, the love of God for Him. God's delight in Him as His servant. My elect, in whom My soul delights. He had been lovely and pleasant in His life, but in His death, He was more lovely and more pleasant still. It was a sacrifice which was a sweet aroma to Almighty God. What a fragrance there was going up, filling heaven from Golgotha. All that obedience, all that willingness to take what the Father had given to Him - the redemption of a company of people more than anyone can number being redeemed, each one, and the fragrance as their names and their eternities were brought there and settled in heaven forevermore. God loved Him for what He was doing. God loved Him very specially, but He couldn't tell Him. The love was a reality, but the sense of it was withheld. The sense of sonship.

You say to me, well now, pastor, that sounds fine, but can you bring me any objective proof for what you've just told us? Well, I take you simply to the great words: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Whenever we are told of Christ praying in the Gospel, until this juncture, whenever His praying is described for us, He always says, "Abba" - the Aramaic for "father." It's fashionable to translate that as "daddy." He was never that to Christ. Holy Father. Righteous Father. We don't in adulthood commonly refer to our aged fathers as "daddy." Father, dad, we say. And so Christ with all His reverence for His Father's righteousness, for His insight into His Father's holiness, yet He can't say "Father" on Calvary - not at the last. "My God." It's wonderful that it's "My God," isn't it? There's no despair on Calvary. There's in many ways faith there in our Lord in every of the utterances that He makes. He's triumphing over unspeakable deprivation. That's the glory that (unintelligible). "My God" - not "My Father." He is conscious that He is face-to-face with infinite, uncreated holiness. He is full of the consciousness of the wrath of God. His Sonship is obscured. I don't say He doubted it, but He wasn't conscious of it. And He is desolate in a sense of help, in a sense of love, in a sense of Sonship. And He cries and there's no one to answer Him. I called, but there is none to hear. And you see the glory of that - that He had no experience of that. Not in eternity. The Word was with God and the Word was God and they were there together. They were eternally delighting in one another, in the



Father and the Son's love. And then He becomes incarnate and He adds a human body and mind to His heavenly, eternal, divine nature. Every day: "Father..." He'd begun the day giving Himself anew to His Father. At the end of every day, thanked God for His presence and help and always they were together - the Father and the Son - always together. Then in the Upper Room, He tells God the Father exactly what He wants. He says, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me shall be with Me where I am." And He prays with confidence in the garden. "Father, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." And He cries now on Golgotha to a God who has always been there, but a God who doesn't seem to Him to be there any longer. And there's no response. There's no angel coming. At His baptism, there was an angel, and at His transfiguration. In the garden, an angel comes and comforts Him. Robert Duncan said after He'd seen Jesus in Heaven, he wanted to see the angel that comforted His Lord.

But there was no voice and no angel there on the cross. No one saying, "You're My lovely Son." "I'm so pleased with everything You've done." "Well done, good and faithful Servant." Just the intolerable eloquent silence from Heaven. He's in the far country. He's in the strange country. He's the scapegoat. He's bearing the sins of the world. He's in the wilderness. He's falling through the bottomless pit. He's swimming through the lake of fire. He's in hell. He's crying to God. All He gets is the echo of His own voice and the chant of the crowd, "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!" And that's all. And then in the Father as He looks, what's there in the Father at that time? As He looks at His Son, as Abram ties Isaac - the promised one, his lovely boy, and he ties him. But Jesus was a lovelier Son. And God was a more loving Father. And all the love was there. The Father's pain and the Father's care. And the Father's longing to spare and the longing to hold His Son's hand and whisper in His Son's ear, but He was anathema because He was made sin. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He was accursed. God couldn't condone. He was the holocaust. And the holocaust must burn and burn until He is consumed.

And so the apostle tells us, "He did not spare His own Son." He must have longed to as a Christian mother is longing knowing something of the pain her daughter's going through. And she went through pain. Let me take that pain, but she can't. Christian mothers have bled in their hearts when the world and the church has turned on men of God and scorned them and longed to relieve their son's pain. And God the Father is there, oh, His wings over Golgotha. His wings over us tonight. His wings over you and your family and your congregation. Sitting down we're told the soldiers watched Him there. They watched Him. They watched Him holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners higher than the heavens, there on that cross. The desolate, derelict, forsaken by the God who loved Him and cared for Him.

But the covenant was this: the cup shall not pass. It couldn't pass. And He says to them again and again, the Son of God must suffer many things. He must suffer. And that "must" isn't rooted in human convention. It's not rooted in theological contrivance but in the great realities of who God is. And He is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. And we may say God can forgive sin. And we can say God loves to forgive sin. We can say God multiplies pardon. The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. We can say that. But God condones nothing and Christ must bear the sin that God forgives. The one who bears is the one who exacts. God demands the atonement. God provides the atonement. God becomes the atonement. God demands a lamb. God finds a lamb. He finds it in His own bosom.

### **God Becomes the Lamb**

And God becomes the Lamb. And that truly is the greatest single reality of the Christian faith. He became a curse for us. He became the Lamb for us. He became the scapegoat. He became the holocaust. (unintelligible) And that's why the paradox is so important because if you are taking what I'm saying in your stride, you'll never see the glory of it. Unless you see the immorality (unintelligible) and the illegality and the ugliness and the utterly indefensible, horrendousness of what is happening on the cross, you'll never see the glory because Calvary is the ugliest deed in the history of the cosmos. It has been and it always will be. It is ugly as human rejection of God. It is ugly as I look on the paradox of God crucifying His own Son. And I need light there because if I can't find light that will illuminate Calvary, then my whole universe is a black hole. There's no reason. There's no logic. There is something here that is more horrific than Belsen.

Why did God crucify His own Son? And the extraordinary answer is: because He loved sinners like me and you. Because He loved us. He was made a curse for us. He had no personal connection with sin, but He became connected to it because He loved us. That made Him a debtor. That made Him a sinner. Paul says it with a boldness. "He made Him sin." That's why God recoiled. That's why He sent Him into the far country. That's why He wouldn't listen to Him when He cried. That's why He wouldn't look when the Savior bled and died. It's a glorious thing, that little word "for." It is the "for" of substitution. For us. My Substitute. My sin there. In Christ on the cross. And God not spared. We are redeemed from the curse of the law. Y

ea, wash Thou me and I shall be whiter than snow. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. He casts our sins into the depths of the sea of His own forgetfulness. All my mean little sins, all my sins against those who love me the most. All my trespasses. At the great mercy seat, I live under the cover of that sacrifice. Once and for all, it is finished. Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. Give me a covering. My sin needs to be covered. (unintelligible) We have a great High Priest.

### **Let's Draw Near to Him**

Well, let's draw near. Let's come with boldness. Let's find mercy. All of us, everybody here tonight. Come now. Come now to Christ for mercy. Come for a covering. There's a covering here. It's available for you tonight - this covering for your sin is here. Don't leave without a covering. It's been woven by the agony and bloody sweat of a Savior who because of His love wouldn't come down till He redeemed you until He paid the price, until He cleared the slate clean. You'll go to Him tonight and say, "Lord, I need a covering." I need forgiveness. I need my sin to be forgotten. Put a veil over it. And the veil is the obedience of Jesus Christ to death - even the death of the cross. I don't believe God ever brings our sins back to haunt us. I believe the devil does. And in our folly, we will go and we will dive in and seek for them and find them again in our folly. The devil will bring them back. We can often say, yes, God forgives our sins, but we don't forgive our own sins. You must. You must. If the blood of Christ has satisfied God's righteousness, it can satisfy your conscience. I must put my past - my indefensible past that I am most ashamed of in my life - I must put it behind me. I must leave it there. Sometimes perhaps when you give your testimony, you needn't even hint at what you once were because grace has changed you and the blood has cleansed you and the righteousness clothes you and

the forgetfulness of God has cast it from you, and He will never bring it before you again. And the Judge when you stand in that great day and give an account of your life. that Judge will be the Savior who gave His life and shed His blood that you might be ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. There is therefore now no condemnation to those are in Christ Jesus.

You take Him tonight. Taking Him is a movement of your heart and soul as the Holy Spirit works by the Word and applies that Word to you and enables to you to say I'm sorry. I'm so wrong keeping You on the outside, and I'm opening my life to You now. Come. Come into me. You say it. There's no formalism. You say it. You start talking to Him. You talk to Him in wonder and thankfulness that you've heard the Gospel of redeeming grace and of comprehensive, complete forgiveness for all our sins through what the Savior has done. And when you stand before Him, and He says, "Why should I let you into My Heaven?" You'll say, "because of Jesus." That's all. Because of Him.

### **Prayer**

Let us pray. We ask Thee, loving God, to work now. We've spoken on such holy matters. Oh Lord, do bless it. Don't let the devil take away the seed, but oh, may it produce fruit in the lives of many here. May they tonight run from their good works and church attendance and their baptism, the Lord's Supper, all the wonderful things, and earlier common graces You've allowed them to do. May they lodge in the wounded side. May they know with wonder their names are written in the palms of Jesus' hands in marks of indelible grace. May they plead: Father, forgive me for Jesus' sake. And may they believe that there is mercy with Him for the chief of sinners that glory may be given to our blessed Savior who stayed there until He saved us - everybody. Accept our doxology of praise and thanks. In Jesus' name, Amen. Now I've asked that we could sing "The Power of the Cross" as our last hymn tonight.