



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 15: 33-41

Mark

"Orphaned Son and Torn Curtain"

TRANSCRIPT

We're still in the Gospel of Mark, and we are in Mark 15, and we're going to consider our Lord's death as Mark sets it forth in verses 33 through 41:

When the sixth hour had come, that would be about noon, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, 3:00 in the afternoon. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which is translated, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

May the Lord bless this reading of this word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great privilege that we do have to come together to read the Scriptures together, to study

them together, and also Father, to pray together, to come before the throne of grace with our petitions as a body at this time. We are reminded by the author of Hebrews to draw close to the throne of grace, to come boldly there. We are doing that, Father, but we confess that we do not do that enough; we do not live in Your presence as we ought to. What a privilege we have as we are reminded this morning from our text, the way into Your presence has been opened by the precious blood of Your Son. We thank You that those who have believed have been brought in. And yet, we could take advantage of our privilege so much more than we do.

But as we do that now, Father, we remember those who have particular needs. We pray for those who are listed on the calendar of concern. We pray for those who are with physical difficulties, those who are recovering from surgery. We pray for them and pray You'd give healing. We pray for those who are looking forward to surgery, those who will go into the hospital this week. And we ask that You would give great blessing there. We pray You'd bless the doctors as they operate and all who are in attendance that things would go well and that there'd be no difficulties.

We pray, Lord, for those in other difficulties. Those with financial needs, those who are unemployed. We pray You'd make provision for them and cause us, who enjoy so many blessings at this time of the year, to rejoice in Your goodness and Your kindness. It's expressed to us in the way in which You provide for our daily needs. And yet, of course, Lord, all of that just pictures in a vague way, the great gift that You have given to us in Your Son. And so, as we enter into this season that is so often used to celebrate our Lord's birth, we pray that You'd give us appreciation of that, but help us, Father, not to fall into the error of thinking that this is something that we do once a year in a grand way, but enable us, Lord, to reflect deeply upon our Lord's birth and the reason for His birth, which was His death at all times during the year, and live in light of it.

We pray that the time we spend this morning in this text, as we consider our Lord's death, a death which He died on our behalf, that we would be filled with gratitude. Give us an understanding of these events and may we make the proper application in our daily lives.

We thank You, Father, for this time, but we also thank You Lord that we can come together again this evening, and we pray You'd bless our meeting this evening. We pray that it would be edifying and that we would truly worship You as we

celebrate our Lord's death, His burial, His resurrection, and His coming again. We pray Your blessing upon the baptism that will take place. It'd be a good testimony to the saving grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now, Lord, we pray You'd bless our time. Bless our hymn as we sing it, may it prepare our hearts for the teaching of the word, and bless our time of study in it. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] Years ago, I stood on Mars Hill in Athens, and stared up at the Acropolis with its ancient columns and marble temples as the afternoon light gave it a kind of a golden appearance. The sight and the experience were all new to me, but it's still rather vivid in my mind. And I can remember being somewhat mesmerized by the sight. And yet, at the same time, having this sense that I was missing something, that I just wasn't able to take it all in. And I suspect that that's a rather common experience for people who visit great sites, the cathedrals and the palaces of Europe or perhaps set their eyes on a majestic mountain range. Because there are some things that are just too big, too grand, and too complicated to take in with one glance. They must be studied. They must be explored.

Calvary is such a place. There is more to it than we can take in with a single glance. It must be studied. It must be explored, not simply as an event of history as to what occurred, but why it occurred, its meaning, what God was doing in the cross. That's a large subject. That's a complicated subject. The cross of Christ is rich in meaning. And yet, at the same time, as complicated as we have to admit that it is, it can also be explained as simply as Paul does in 2 Corinthians 5:1: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself."

That's why the cross is the focal point of the Christian faith. It's the central event of human history. And the key word in that statement that Paul makes is that we're reconciling. Reconciliation means bringing back together two people who have suffered a breakdown in their relationship. It means bringing two warring parties together in peace, making peace between them. That's what God was doing at the cross.

The reason He was doing that was because a breakdown had occurred between God and man. War broke out in the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned. Adam fired the first shot, and mankind has been firing at God ever since. Because when the head

of the human race fell, all of His descendants fell with him. And all of his descendants have become guilty in that rebellion with him, and that's what Paul states. Romans chapter 3 verse 32, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That means that we are all guilty of sin. Guilty of the sin of Adam in his rebellion, and guilty of our own sins as we continue in that rebellion.

And as a consequence, we are under divine condemnation, because God is not only the creator of the race; He is also the judge of the race, and He has passed sentence upon our race. The sentence is death, because as Paul goes onto state, the wages of sin is death, physical death. But fundamentally, and really more importantly, spiritual death, eternal death. All men have come under that terrible verdict; all men are under that terrible condemnation. God is just. And because He is just, He judges sin wherever it is found.

But God is also love, and He delights in showing mercy. And that's why the cross is so important. It is the place where justice and love met. It is the place where God made peace between Himself and the sinner. But He made peace at a very great price. It began at the ninth hour, according to verse 33. The first three hours of the crucifixion had been filled with activity; there was the activity of the soldiers, who nailed our Lord to the crossbeam and then hoisted Him up to the vertical beam where they drove a spike through His feet and secured Him to the cross, and then there were the passersby who were hurling abuse and insults at Him, and the priests, and the thieves who joined in with them.

It was during this period that the Lord uttered His first three statements from the cross when He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Later, He accepted the repentant thief into His kingdom saying, "Truly, I say to you: today you shall be with me in paradise." And then He commended His mother into the care of John, saying "Woman, behold your Son."

But apart from our Lord's words and apart from His conduct, the crucifixion may have seemed, really, little different than any other crucifixion. Until the third hour, until noon. And then, all of that changed, when the sun was at its height, when it was brightest, it went into an eclipse, an eerie darkness settled over the land which lasted until the ninth hour, or until 3:00 in the afternoon.

Now, Mark doesn't explain how it occurred. Our first thought would be that this was a solar eclipse, but that would've been impossible since this was at the time

of the Passover, and there was a full moon. And in addition, an eclipse never lasts three hours. Other suggestions have been that dark thunder clouds probably formed and obscured the face of the sun, or perhaps a dust storm occurred from the winds that came off the desert. But whatever is suggested, it's clear that Mark understood this darkness as a supernatural act and as a miraculous sign. Frequently in the Bible, darkness signifies judgment for sin, as when God cast darkness over the land of Egypt in the ninth plague of the Book of Exodus. Here, it covered the land of Judah, which had become very much like Egypt in its unbelief.

But, this darkness did not so much signify the sin of Judah, or the sin of the world, as it did the judgment and the sin that had gathered at the cross, the sin and judgment that our Lord was bearing for the many. Because this is when God laid the sins of His people on His son and on our substitute.

The judgment on Him suggested by the darkness was echoed in the startling words that the Lord cried out at the end of this three hour period, that this cry that pierced the darkness with the fourth utterance, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" Which means, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This is the only one of the seven sayings from the cross that Mark records, but it's the principle one, the one that really gives us a window on the nature of our Lord's death and what was occurring on the cross. It's His cry of dereliction, as it's sometimes called. The cry of abandonment in which the Lord, God's only begotten Son, was made an orphan, forsaken by His Father.

Startling words, painful words. Martin Luther was surprised by them when as a young monk in a German monastery, he was reading through the psalms, which was his custom, His practice to do that. And He came to Psalm 22 and verse 1 and read, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And he recognized in those words the words that the Lord had spoken from the cross, and realized this this is the only time that the Lord prayed to His Father and called Him "God." He always prayed to Him as "Father." In fact, just a few hours earlier, you'll remember in the garden of Gethsemane, in that period of agony in which that He went through, He prayed to His Father, and He called Him "Abba." He uses that very personal expression of address.

But on the cross, it was now, "My God," not, "My Father." Luther wondered, why the change? Why was He forsaken? He had not sinned. He was perfect, and yet He was forsaken by His Father. Well, the answer, as Luther would later discover, is

Jesus was not abandoned because of any sin that He had committed. He was abandoned for our sin. He had become the substitute for sinners on the cross. He endured our penalty in our place when, in the words of Paul, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." Made Him to be the sin bearer.

And sin has that consequence of separating men from God, bringing them under judgment. And so, with the words, "My God," the Lord recognized that His relationship between Him and His Father had changed. A significant change had occurred. At that moment, He no longer saw Himself as God's eternal Son, but He saw Himself as a man under God's judgment.

As Dr. Johnson put it in his studies in Matthew, he regarded His relationship to God at this precise moment as being a judicial one, not a paternal one. And so, God, whom the Psalmist describes as a Father to the fatherless, made His own son fatherless, in order that He might become our Father. He orphaned His own Son in order that we who believe might not be orphans. Amazing event that occurs there, that we're looking at. We think of our Lord, spotless Lamb of God, gentle, kind, merciful. And yet, at this time, not only is He abandoned by His closest friends and associates, His disciples. But now, He's abandoned by His own Father. Because it was at this moment that the Lord experienced the penalty of spiritual death, which is separation from God. Here, the judgment of the cross occurred when He experienced hell on our behalf.

Now, that's a statement I'm sure that you have heard before. Christ experienced hell in our place. And yet that statement is one that might puzzle you if you think about it. Because, we might wonder: how could it be that He experienced hell on our behalf? How could Christ experience hell? Hell is of eternal duration. It is endless punishment, and the Lord's punishment was not endless. It was relatively short, as a matter of fact. It was a momentary kind of punishment. And so, how can we call that hell?

I think that's a good question, and I raise it because it has been raised to me, and one that I have puzzled over myself at times, and one that's been discussed by the theologians. But to understand it, and I don't want to give the impression that we can ever fully understand this question. The Lord's experience is ultimately too deep for us to comprehend. Calvary is more than we can fully take in. But to understand what we can, we have to remember that our Lord is a unique person. A theanthropic

person. Theos, God; anthropos, man. He is both divine and human. He is the Godman, the one and the only one in whom are united in one person. Two natures: a divine nature and a human nature. He's not two people. Now, I think that needs to be underscored. He is not a divine person and a human person. He is one person with two natures. And so, He is both finite and infinite. In His divine nature, He is infinite. He is unlimited. In His human nature, He's finite, He's limited. But both together make Him an infinite person. He is the Godman.

And so, that being the case, His suffering, though it occurred in His humanity, affected His whole person, and so was infinite. Now, this is a difficult subject to explain in just a few minutes, but let me illustrate it. In fact I borrow the illustration from the Presbyterian theologian, William GT Shedd, who does discuss this at some length, and I think is a very helpful discussion on it. But he illustrates this from our own human condition. We are both physical and mental creatures. We are material and immaterial.

But when a person injures himself, let's say burns himself, that happens in His physical nature, not in the immaterial part of man, not in the mental nature, because the mental, the immaterial cannot be burned. But the mind, while it can't be burned, is affected by what takes place in the physical. In fact it gives awareness of the pain. So, the whole person suffers both physically and mentally.

And so too the sufferings of our Lord in His human nature, affected His divine nature because both are connected in one person. And because He is the infinite person, His sufferings were infinite. Now, Shedd goes on to illustrate the point of our Lord's infinite suffering by comparing the suffering of a human with an animal. Animals suffer pain, but as he points out, the character and the value, the significance of their suffering is not as great as that of the suffering of a human. A human suffering, the suffering of a human is much greater because man's personality is much higher than that of an animal. We are rational, we are immortal, as opposed to, as Shedd puts it, the brute, which is an unreasoning and perishing creature.

Now, you've got to remember that Shedd wrote over 100 years ago, before there was an SPCA or because there was an animal rights movement, so He's perhaps not speaking in a politically correct way, but that's the reason. But granting his illustration, and I realize that's not easy to do; you have a pet at home, maybe a little dog, furry little dog and it looks up to you with those dark eyes, and maybe licks you

on the face. It's hard to consider that its sufferings are not as great or as significant as yours, but putting our affection for our animals aside, I think that he has a very good point, that the suffering of an animal is not as great, is not as significant as the suffering of, say, a child. The suffering of an insect is not as great as that of the suffering of an animal, and the suffering of an animal does not compare to that of a human.

So you can see, I think, at least it's reasonable to say, that the greater the person is, the greater the suffering, and no one is greater than our Lord. He is infinite in His person, and so His sufferings are of infinite significance, infinite value. So whether His suffering lasted 10 minutes or 10 years, or 10,000 plus 10,000 years, it is infinite suffering, suffering of infinite values. So when He hung on the cross and died spiritually, when He was made sin for us, and His Father abandoned Him, He truly suffered the infinite wrath of God, the pains of hell. And that's reflected in those painful words, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

So forsaken by His Father, He gives out this cry of abandonment. It was a cry of dereliction. And yet, it was not a cry of despair. Arthur Pink writes in his book, "The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross," "It was a cry of distress but not of distrust." Even in the midst of this terrible moment, the most agonizing moment that any man has ever experienced on earth, and no one has suffered as our Lord suffered, not even the souls in hell suffer as much as our Lord did on that cross. And yet, in the midst of that, you still see His trust, because it is "My God, My God." He clings to Him. There is that aspect of trust, even in the midst of the darkness, and even in the midst of the abandonment. And ultimately, God did deliver Him as He will deliver all of us. And we continue to trust in our God.

The Lord gives us a great deal of theology in the event here, but also a great example of His faithfulness. We're to follow in that and continue to trust in the Lord, knowing that He is trustworthy, and He will not abandon us, because He's abandoned His Son. But to His question: why had He been forsaken? Is the answer: He'd been forsaken in order that others might be received, in order that sinners might be reconciled to God, forgiven, and saved eternally?

And yet, the question is still asked: why? Why all of this judgment, death, hell? Why the cross? Why can't God just forgive sin, put it behind Him, so to speak, and be done with it? Just declare that all sins have been cancelled and forgiven. And

the answer to that must be: that would be a mockery of justice. We don't even see that among men, really. The end of the Second World War. There were war crime trials in Germany and held in Nuremberg, and no one considers that to be an unreasonable thing. In fact, we consider that to be the act of a civilized society, that we would address those terrible crimes. And today, as things of a similar nature are going on in Europe and Bosnia, we hear people talking about war crimes.

Men have an innate sense of the need of justice. We see it in the way we carry out our lives. Why would it be any less true of God? In fact, we would expect it to be even more true of our Lord God who is perfect, and who is holy, because justice and holiness demand that sin be dealt with. And to suggest otherwise is to fail to see just how serious sin is, and just how holy God is. That is why the cross was necessary. God must punish sin either in us, in the sinner, or in a substitute for the sinner. And in the cross, God gave us a substitute. He gave us the way of escape from His just punishment. At the same time, He satisfied fully His just demands against sin. The cross is God's solution to sin. It is the way to forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration to God.

Now, as He cries out, "*Eloi, Eloi*," "My God, My God," some of those who are gathered around the cross misunderstood Him to be crying out, "Elijah." "Behold, He is calling for Elijah," they said. There was a reason for that not only in the similarity of the words, but 'cause there was a popular belief among the Jews at that time that Elijah will come in times of critical need to protect the innocent and rescue the righteous. And so, they were waiting to see what would happen, see if that would occur.

Well, it's at this time, as John tells us, that the Lord also said, "I am thirsty." So one of the soldiers immediately responded, and I think it was a response of kindness. Maybe at this point he had been one to the Lord. At least his sympathies had, and so he responded quickly by filling a sponge with sour wine, putting it on a reed, and giving Him a drink. Sour wine was the drink of laborers and soldiers. Cheap wine, but it was very effective in relieving thirst. Earlier, you remember, He had rejected the wine that was mixed with myrrh, which was a narcotic drink, and rejected that because He wanted to stay conscious. He wanted to keep His senses clear because He had much to do on the cross. You see that in the "Seven Sayings from the Cross." He was in control of this whole event. So He kept His mind clear.

Here, He accepts wine for the same reason, in order to refresh Himself and remain conscious, and keep His senses clear as He drew to the end of His ministry on the cross. And so, strengthened somewhat by the wine, we read in verse 37 that Jesus "uttered a loud cry." This was His triumphant sixth statement, "It is finished." He had completed His spiritual death. All that remained now was His physical death. With that, Mark says, "He breathed His last."

It was an unusual death because normally, men suffered complete exhaustion and unconsciousness before they died. You know that because we learn in the gospels of the practice of the soldiers, how they would go and hasten the death of someone who was close to it by breaking their legs, some act in that fashion. They would run out of energy, so to speak. Their strength would go out before they died. And yet, here the Lord doesn't end in exhaustion. He ends with strength. He ends with a loud cry, a shout of victory. Then, He died, or as John writes, "gave up His spirit," which again indicates how He controlled the events. He dismissed His spirit when He willed to do it.

Augustus Toplady, who we know for his great hymn, "Rock of Ages," said of our Lord's death: "When He knew that He had fulfilled all the prophecies that related to Him and suffered enough to procure the salvation of His people, He voluntarily retired from life." And it is a voluntary death, and an unusual death. He had accomplished His mission, He had atoned for sin, He had satisfied God's justice, and in so doing had broken down the barrier of sin that separated God and man. All that remained was for Him to dismiss His spirit. And when He did that, an amazing thing occurred. The veil of the temple, Mark tells us, was torn in two from top to bottom.

Now, that's a reference to the beautiful curtain that hung between the holy place and the holy of holies. The curtain through which the high priest would enter into that holy of holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, the Ten Commandments were kept, the mercy seat was. And He could only enter into that holy of holies once a year on the great day of atonement. But to do that, He had to go through the curtain. Other than that He was kept out. In fact all of the ordinary people of the land of the nation were kept out by that curtain.

And so, it was often seen as symbol of man's inability to enter into the presence of God due to sin. it was a barrier between God and man, a barrier that kept man out of God's presence. And yet, our Lord dies and suddenly, with that death, it

was opened up. Torn from top to bottom. I think that's very significant because that indicates or would certainly suggest that it was a supernatural act, torn from top to bottom, indicating that this was an act of God, and torn in connection with our Lord's death indicating by that that He had broken down the barrier of sin and He had opened up the way to God.

Now, the author of Hebrews develops that very idea in chapter 10 of his letter where he likens the torn veil which opened the way into the holy of holies to the death of Christ, which opened up the way into the presence of God. He writes in chapter 10 verses 19 and 20, "Since, therefore brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil that is His flesh," then he goes on to exhort them to draw near with a sincere heart.

Now, the point of the comparison has got to be understood in terms of what the priests did, the Levitical priest, the high priest. He could enter the holy of holies, but only by going through the veil. That was the way of entrance into that place of God's presence. And so also, following that analogy, no one can enter into the very presence of God except through Christ. The veil, that is, His flesh. So, he sees in the veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place and kept people out of God's presence, he sees an analogy between that and our Lord's flesh.

Now, not just our Lord's flesh. Not just His humanity. He's not saying that we enter into the presence of God through our Lord's life as though by following His example; it is His flesh in death, His humanity in death. As He says, we enter by His blood, by His crucified flesh. That is the way of entrance into the presence of God. Just as the tearing of the veil opened up the holy of holies, so the death of Christ, the tearing of His flesh on the cross, so to speak, opens up heaven. Had the veil of the temple remained intact, the holy of holies would've remained closed. And so too had the veil of our Lord's flesh remained intact, had He not died, heaven and access to God would also have remained closed. But with the Lord's death, the way is forever open. In the cross, the barrier of sin has been broken down and God's justice has been satisfied. Peace has been established between God and men, and now this ministry, this great ministry of reconciliation that Paul writes of has begun. All who believe in Christ are united with God; the separation is ended.

In fact, the author of Hebrews develops that exhortation as we saw, urging them to draw near. He does that earlier in his epistle. It's one of the great exhortations of that book. Draw near to the throne of grace, and we can do that because we have been given access to it. We have been brought into the presence of God, and we are to live that way. That is one of the great blessings that Christ has accomplished for us on the cross. All of this was accomplished at Calvary.

That's why the cross is central to all of the Scriptures. It is where God's justice and love met. His justice fell on His Son in order that He might pour out His love upon us, upon all who believe in Him. And so, the cross is the standard of love. If you want to know what the love of God is, look at the cross, for God so loved the world, so loved sinners, that He would sacrifice His only begotten Son for them.

How do we possibly take all of that in with a single glance, with a single lesson? Calvary is really too great for us to comprehend with one lesson or with a whole lifetime of lessons. It is impressive, and many of those who were standing at the cross sensed that. Staring at the Lord, they could see that there was something different in all of this. They sensed the greatness of it, the soldiers who witnessed it had seen many deaths by crucifixion. But they had never witnessed a death like our Lord's. It didn't fit with anything they'd ever seen. They had never heard such majestic utterances from a dying man in such pain, in such shame. They'd never seen such strength and control as He breathed His last.

And so when He did, when He breathed His last, the Roman centurion standing there said, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." Magnificent confession. He confessed our Lord to be the Messiah, the very thing that the Jewish leaders would not do. And yet, this Roman does. How much he understood at that moment, we cannot say. Calvary, as we have been saying, is more than anyone can take in at a glance. Legend has it that the centurion became a Christian and traveled to Britain with Joseph of Arimathea. It's a legend. Don't know if it's true, but his confession was true. I think it was an expression of faith on his part, faith on the part of a Roman man, and a confession that affirms the very point of Mark's gospel.

He begins this gospel in the very first verse by saying the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And here, as his gospel is coming to its conclusion, that same point is again confirmed by the confession of a Gentile of all people. It bears out the point that we see other places in Scripture, particularly in

John's gospel where he writes, "He came to His own, came to His Jewish brothers and sisters, but His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them, He gave the right to become children of God." Jew and Gentile, all who believe are received by our Lord and received into God's family.

So, this Roman who's standing very close and witnessing these things made that great confession. There were others who were sympathetic with our Lord. Some distance away, we're told in verses 40 and 41 of a group of women who had faithfully served the Lord. They stood there watching. They had come up from Galilee with Him, and they remained with Him to the very end, and I think that's a striking thing, because the Lord's own disciples had not done that. All of the men, with the exception of John, had fled. They were in hiding. And yet, here are these women, remaining faithful to Him all the way to the end. They were loyal.

Now, how much of the spectacle of the cross they understood, again, it's hard to say. They stood some distance away. I think that's interesting because it was years earlier, 1,500 years earlier when God had visited His people originally. He came to a mountain, Mount Sinai. And there, He delivered the law to His people. And you remember the scene, the mountain quaked? It was a fearful sight, and the people stood afar off watching this in fear. Would not even let an animal touch the mountain because it would die. It was a terrible sight, a fearful sight because their God was giving the law. And so, they stood afar off.

And here, we see these women. Again, observing a visitation by the Lord, and this time He is again on a mountain. They are watching it from afar. There, the Lord was suffering the penalty of the broken law. Now, whether they understood the significance of that or not, it's hard to know. How much they understood, we cannot say. Probably very little because we see them in the next chapter at the tomb, surprised by the resurrection.

It's their devotion to Him that stands out, and it's their devotion to Him that will lead them into greater understanding, because they are people of faith, through the little bit of faith they had, God would increase it, and they will come to understand more. But their lack of understanding here is somewhat understandable. We, after all, live on the clear side of the cross. We can consider Calvary from the advantage of the resurrection and from the teaching of the apostles. But even with us, there is more than we can take in. Even with years of study, not only is Calvary the place of

atonement for God's people where Christ satisfied God's justice in regard to the sinner and secured forgiveness, but it's the source of numerous blessings for us in the present time.

Romans 8 and verse 32, Paul writes, "He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" If God loved you enough to sacrifice His Son for your salvation, what won't He do for you now and forever? Having orphaned His Son, He will never orphan His Sons. He will never leave us. He will never forsake us, and that is a promise that He has given to His people. It's what He promised to His own disciples just before going to the cross, knowing that He would be abandoned there. He reassures them with the words, "I will not leave you as orphans."

And He never will. As Christians, we are never abandoned by Him. We will never be orphaned by Him. The Lord is always with us. And at every moment, He cares for us. The cross is the guarantee of that, as well as the demonstration of God's love, and a demonstration of the extent of His care for us.

I think that should be a great comfort for us as we go through various trials, and there are all kinds of trials that we go through. Trials of a physical nature, sickness that can be extremely debilitating, painful, suffering in the family, broken relationships. The list can go on of the difficulties that we experience. But it should be great comfort as we think about those sufferings in light of the cross, because if God loves us enough to abandon His own son in judgment, then there must be a good reason for the trials that He allows in our life. We may not understand the meaning of them, but we can know that there is a meaning for them. God knows it, and He's using it well in our lives. We should never measure God's love for us by our own sufferings, but by the sufferings of His Son.

It's the great demonstration of God's love. So important to look back to Calvary and reflect on the cross, to consider what He has done. We can never take it all in. That's for sure. But, it's too big, it's too grand, it's too complicated. But we can know that it is the measure of God's unconditional, unending love for sinners, and it's the means of His great work of salvation of reclaiming sinners for Himself.

We can know this: that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. What a grand work of salvation and grace. Not just a little group of Jews within Palestine. He's reconciling the world. He's reconciling some from every tribe, and

tongue, and people, and nation, Jew and gentile alike, more than any man or woman can number. That's that great work of reconciliation that He accomplished on the cross.

And so, the question that I ask you is: have you been reconciled to God, or are you still a stranger still at war with Him? I mentioned earlier how Luther as a young monk was puzzled as to why Christ was abandoned on the cross. It was later as he studied the Book of Romans that he came to understand the matter and understand the reason for the Lord's death. He was reading Romans 1:17 where Paul writes of the gospel, "For in it is the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, but the righteous man or the just shall live by faith." That was the opposite of what Luther was doing. He had not been living by faith. He'd been living by works as a monk. He had a great struggle with sin, was very sensitive to sin, and tried to gain God's acceptance, His approval, by working out in his life God's righteousness.

But he failed miserably. In fact, the more that he worked, the less that he felt reconciled, the greater he felt the separation. In fact, He felt God was his enemy. Finally, he saw in Romans 1:17 that it is not through works that we gain the righteousness of God, but through faith. Forgiveness and righteousness are God's gifts which we receive through faith. And as he would write in his German translation of the New Testament: faith alone. We can be accepted by God because on the cross, God rejected His Son, forsook Him when He took our punishment in our place.

That's the gospel. That's the message of the cross, that one has died in our place and we can be reconciled to God, forgiven and brought into His family by simply receiving Christ as Savior, saying "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying for me. I'm trusting in You, trusting in what You've done for me on the cross. I receive You as my Savior. Receive me as Your son." And He will do that, receive everyone who comes to Him in faith. If you have not done that, I urge you: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to Him, trust in Him. You cannot be saved by your works; you can't add anything to what He did on the cross. He bore the full penalty of sin, the infinite weight of sin, the infinite guilt of sin was born by Him on the cross. What could you possibly do to add to what He has done? Nothing. Simply receive it. Receive it by faith. May God help you to do that, if you've not believed in Christ. Those of us who have, may God help us to reflect deeply on the cross and on its significance, and what

He has accomplished for us, and live in light of that grace. It has saved us, now and forever. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the gift of life in Your Son. We do thank You that You so love the world that You sent Your only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. What a relief. What a blessing to know that it's not by our works, as Luther himself discovered. It's not by any effort on our behalf to be righteous. We cannot be righteous before You, but we can receive Your righteousness through the cross, through simply receiving the work of Christ on our behalf, believing in Him. Thank You for that. May we live in light of it. Thank You for Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.