

# “COME TO THE CROSS OF JESUS”

Mark 15:33-47

Key Verse: 15:34

**“And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).”**

If there is one verse in the Bible that Christians are crazy about more than any other, it's John 3:16. Some Christians have t-shirts that say “John 3:16” on them while others make posters to hold up at basketball games. Quarterback Tim Tebow is famous for having John 3:16 written under his eyes during football games. Some Christians even get the verse tattooed on their shoulders and backs. A long time ago, I made deliveries for a catering company who put John 3:16 on the bottom of their boxes of food and even now the clothing store “Forever 21” has it written on all their bags. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** We find in this verse exactly one fact and one promise. The fact is God's love for the whole world and the promise is eternal life for those who believe in him. But how can this be? Chris Tomlin sings that God's love is like a waterfall. But, to be honest, we don't always feel that way. And when you start talking about eternal life around nonbelievers, they look at you like your nuts. A better life by following Jesus? Maybe. But eternal life? It seems too farfetched. So how can we be sure about the fact and promise of God's love? The answer is found at the cross. Paul writes, **“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”** This morning, we are going to find something to boast about. Let's come to the cross of Jesus and see the evidence of God's love and salvation.

**First, darkness covered the whole land (33).** The first thing we encounter as we come to the cross this morning is darkness. Look at verse 33: **“At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.”** During the first part of his crucifixion, Jesus suffered at the hands of men. He was beaten and flogged, mocked and spat upon. As he hung there on the cross, we can't imagine the pain as he pushed on the nails in his feet and pulled on the nails in his hands every time he needed a breath. But now, at

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noon, a darkness came over the whole land. During the next three hours on the cross, Jesus would suffer at the hands of God himself.

We have all seen thunderstorms that have made the sky as dark as night. But that wasn't the case here. It wasn't cloudy. The darkness was not an eclipse or some other bizarre solar effect. The darkness that enshrouded the cross was a supernatural darkness. Before the first Passover, God sent 10 plagues upon Egypt because Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. The ninth of these plagues was the plague of darkness. Exodus 10 says, **“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt – darkness that can be felt.’ So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days.”** After the darkness came the tenth plague. The tenth plague was God's final act of judgment against Egypt as the angel of death claimed the lives of every firstborn child and animal. So we see that darkness represents the imminent judgment of God.

Here, at the cross of Jesus, is a darkness we must feel. This darkness didn't belong to him. It belongs to us. It is the darkness of our sin and shame and it signifies the judgment of God that we deserve. Romans 3:23 says, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** *We* are the guilty ones! So why did this darkness surround the Lord? He was completely innocent. The Bible says that on the cross, Jesus became sin. The holy, pure, and righteous Lamb of God became exactly what he despised. He became sin so that God's judgment might be poured out upon him instead of on us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** All of our sins were placed upon the Lord - every lie, every slander, every hurt, and every neglect. Darkness covered the *whole* land because everyone is guilty. At the cross, the sin of the whole world was placed upon the Lamb of God.

**As we come to the cross today, we remember that it was for our sin that Jesus died, the righteous for the unrighteous.**

**Second, Jesus was forsaken by the Father (34-36).** Verse 34 says, **“And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).** Right away, we know that something has changed. This was the only

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place in the Bible where Jesus referred to the Father as “my God”. As Jesus cried out these words, his suffering went far beyond the pain of crucifixion. He was forsaken by the Father for our sins.

Sin separates us from God. Before he sinned, Adam enjoyed a wonderful and open relationship with God. The Lord would come to the garden and walk with Adam. Adam enjoyed life to the fullest as God’s appointed steward over all the earth. But when Adam sinned, this relationship was broken. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden. They couldn’t dwell in the presence of the Lord any longer. Although Adam lived on for many years, his spiritual death was immediate.

Forsaken by God is the fate of every sinner. A holy and righteous God cannot dwell in the presence of sin. A time is coming when the Lord will say to those who reject him **“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** As Jesus became sin on our behalf, he not only bore the wrath of God, but separation from God as well. In fact, this is exactly what hell is. Hell is complete and eternal separation from God. Even the most evil person on the earth has not experienced that level of separation. The most ardent atheist, the worst dictator, and the vilest murderer on earth live solely by the grace and provision of the Lord. But on the cross, Jesus was completely abandoned by God. During those three hours, he suffered the full weight of hell for each one of us. He suffered hell for me, for my wife, and for my three daughters. He suffered hell for my mother and my father. He suffered hell for the sea of people around us in Chicago. He suffered hell for the great multitudes in heaven. Revelation 7:9 says, **“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”** They could stand before the throne of God because Jesus, the Holy Lamb of God, was sacrificed for their sins. God cannot and will not overlook our sin for it is impossible for our Almighty and Holy God to simply sweep our sins under the carpet. There is no land fill on the back of Neptune or Mars where God can simply dump our sins. No. Christ was forsaken by God and bore the punishment we deserved.

We cannot fathom how much our Lord suffered as he was separated from the Father. Last week on Yahoo! I saw a very touching story of a couple who

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had been married for 67 years. Sensing that the couple was close to death, their children pushed their hospice beds together and gently put their hands together. And then, as if they couldn't bear separation, the couple passed away on the very same day. It is hard for us to comprehend such unity. But the Father and the Son had enjoyed a perfect unity that went back further than time itself. Jesus said **“I and the Father are one.”** And our Heavenly Father had the same message. One time He spoke from the heavens saying **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** But on the cross, Jesus was forsaken. The relationship he treasured more than anything was broken as he hung there on the cross and as the Father turned his back on him.

Listen to the agony of his cry: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** Jesus was quoting Psalm 22: **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.”** It happened so that the righteousness of God would be satisfied. It happened so that the grace and mercy of God would be proclaimed throughout the heavens and the earth. It happened so that we would never be separated from God again.

Look at verses 35 and 36. **“When some of those standing near heard this, they said, ‘Listen, he’s calling Elijah.’ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.”** According to Jewish folklore, Elijah would come to the rescue of those who are suffering. However, Elijah didn't come. Jesus was truly forsaken by God.

**At the cross, we remember that Christ was forsaken so that we might be reconciled to God.**

**Third, Jesus breathed his last (37-38).** Verses 37-38 say, **“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”** This time, the loud cry was not a cry of agony, but of victory. John's gospel says that, **“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”** The cup of wrath has been completely emptied and what Paul says in Romans 8 can now be shouted from the mountain tops: **“...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ**

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**Jesus the law of the spirit who give life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”** We are confident of our salvation because its terrible cost has been paid in full. Revelation 5:9 says that a new song was sung to the Lamb: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Our debt is now zero! Have you experienced the joy of paying off a credit card that’s been hanging around for years? When you open that envelope that has your statement inside and it says your balance is zero, you just want to dance the whole day. Many years ago, before I became a teacher, I worked all kinds of jobs to support my family and to stay in school. As hard as I tried, I never made enough money to cover all our needs and I eventually ended up owing the IRS \$70,000 in unpaid taxes and fees. We spent years going from one payment plan to another. And then one day, we were on the phone with the IRS and they told us that almost all of our debt had been forgiven. Only \$6,500 remained. I scraped up everything we had and went to the IRS office in person and paid it the very next day. An overwhelming sense of freedom came over us that day. My wife and I hugged each other for hours. Our debt was finally gone.

Here, hanging on the cross, now still and lifeless, our Lord’s body can be seen as the receipt of our redemption. His holy body, now bereft of life, is the title and deed of our salvation. This is what our Lord taught his disciples at the Last Supper. His body was broken and his blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins. Isaiah 1:18 says, **“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”**

As further proof of our reconciliation with God, verse 38 says that **“The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”** The Jerusalem temple had a curtain that was about 60 feet high and 30 feet in width. It was four inches thick and it represented the huge barrier of sin that existed between God and sinners. But in his great mercy through Jesus’ death God tore it down from top to bottom. Through his death our debts are fully paid and now we can come to God freely by the blood of Jesus at any time and at any place. God has opened a new and living way to himself through Jesus.

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**“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.”** What love! Jesus said, **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”** How extravagant! How expensive! The greatest love comes at the greatest cost. I love my three daughters with all my heart. But my love doesn’t come anywhere near to the love my wife has for them. It simply can’t because the love she has for them came at a much higher cost than mine. She bore all the pain as they were born. I simply stood there and looked kind of scared. She bore the responsibility of taking care of all their needs, especially when they became sick and snot was flying everywhere. Even now, she is the one who’ll drop everything for them and go and get a poster board or a pizza or medicine or whatever they need. Love is proven by its cost.

**At the cross, we see the infinite depth of God’s love for us.**

**Fourth, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (39-41).** 1 Corinthians 1:18 says, **“The mission of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.”** Here, right at the foot of the cross, we see that power at work. Verse 39 says, **“And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the son of God!”** Jesus prophesied about the power of the cross, saying **“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”** The criminal crucified by Jesus was the first example of this and now the centurion was another. The centurion was a real bad dude. After all, he was the commander of a unit responsible for the torture and execution of hundreds of criminals. By all accounts, such a person would be considered unreachable. I think even UBF missionaries would turn and run away from him if they saw him on college campus. But even this tough centurion’s heart melted as he witnessed the events at the cross. The centurion had never seen anyone or anything like this before. He realized he was in the presence of deity and with all the faith he had the time, he declared the main point of Mark’s gospel: **“Surely this man was the Son of God!”** The testimony of the centurion gives us the conviction we need to take the gospel to our campuses. The message of the cross has a life-changing power.

Verses 40-41 say, **“Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had**

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**followed him and cared for his needs...**” Mark writes that many other women were there as well. These women stayed near the cross and never took their eyes off of Jesus. Such women are the most beautiful women in the world.

**As we come to the cross, we realize its power to change lives.**

**Fifth, the burial of Jesus (42-47).** Look at verses 42-43. **“It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate asked for Jesus’ body.”** Joseph was a rich and influential member of the Jewish society, much like a handsome, young senator in our day. Joseph was a godly man who was waiting and looking for the Messiah to come. In fact, John’s gospel says that **“Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.”** However, when Joseph witnessed Christ’s love on the cross, his heart was changed. When he saw Jesus’ suffering and death for his sake – the Lamb of God sacrificed for his sin and the sin of the world – all the fear in his heart was driven out. At the cross, Joseph experienced the amazing grace of God and now his heart burned with love for his savior. Look at the change in this follower of Christ! All his fear was completely gone! Verse 43b says that Joseph went *boldly* to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. In the past, he had been afraid of the other Jewish leaders. But now, his status and rank no longer mattered to him. From now until eternity, Jesus was the only thing that mattered to him.

There was a sense of urgency about Joseph. Evening was approaching and because the Sabbath began at sundown, he had to work fast. After Pilate verified that Jesus had died, he gave the body to Joseph. Verse 46 says, **“So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock.”** Joseph went from being a secret follower to being one of the most beautiful disciples in the world. We see his heart for the Lord in this verse and I’m sure that tears were streaming down his face as he hurried to prepare the Lord’s body for burial. We can picture him washing the blood out of our Lord’s hair and cleansing all the open wounds on the Lord’s body. John’s gospel says that Nicodemus was there as well. With tender care, they wrapped the Lord’s body in linen and packed it with spices. Then they placed it in a tomb cut out of rock and rolled

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a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Verse 47 says, **“Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.”** They too were waiting for an opportunity to show their love for the Lord as they witnessed the whole thing.

The Bible says that **“we love because he first loved us.”** Are we still living as secret disciples? I pray that the cross of Jesus would change all of that. Today, starting right now, let’s become bold and passionate lovers of Jesus. Joseph saw an opportunity to serve the Lord and he grabbed it. We can do the same. Jesus says, **“Love each other as I have loved you.”** Let’s do it! He also says **“Go and make disciples of all nations”**. Oh Lord, help us to do this as well! Help us to be bold witnesses of the cross.

**At the cross, we find a new life and a new love for the Lord.**

Dear friends, you might not ever get John 3:16 tattooed on your back or shoulders. However, I pray that the message of God’s love and salvation will be written on your hearts forever.