

A CRY FROM THE CROSS

JOHN 19:28

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, ‘I thirst!’”

On June 22, 1997 two men jumped out of a perfectly good airplane flying at an altitude of 12,000 feet.

One of the men was a 42 year-old parachute instructor named, Michael Costello. The other man was a 21 year-old skydiver named, Gareth Griffith.

Costello was a professional - a veteran of thousands of jumps. Griffith was a beginner - and on this particular trip, the responsibility of Costello.

Trust me, skydiving is not on my bucket list, but if I ever do go skydiving I hope I have an instructor as devoted and dedicated as Michael Costello.

When the two men jumped from the plane, and the novice pulled his rip cord, his parachute refused to open. Gareth Griffith found himself plummeting towards the earth from 12,000 feet in a total free fall.

His prospects for survival looked grim.

That's before Costello came to the rescue. In an amazing act of courage and sacrifice, Michael Costello refused to open his parachute, and stayed by the side

of his pupil as they both fell. At the last second the instructor grabbed Griffith and rolled over so that he hit the ground first. The beginner landed on top of him.

Obviously, Costello died on impact, but he was able to cushion Griffith's fall. Gareth survived. He suffered a fractured spine, but avoided both death and paralysis.

And here's the moral of the story, *when Michael Costello is your friend, you have a real friend...* And likewise, when you have Jesus as a friend you have someone who loves you more than you can imagine!

Jesus joined the human race in its free fall - and on a hill called "Calvary" He took the brunt of our hit in order to save the lives of those who would follow Him.

Never has there been such sacrificial heroism.

After Abraham Lincoln was assassinated his body was taken from Washington to his home in Illinois.

As the funeral procession passed through the town of Albany, NY people lined the streets to see the casket of their fallen leader. One black woman stood on the curb and she lifted her son as high as she could reach.

Up above the heads of the crowd she told her little boy, "Take a long look, honey. He died for you."

And this evening I want to take you to Calvary's cross, and show you Jesus - *hanging... all bloody and bleeding*. I want you to see His *agony... and marvel at His attitude... and listen to His pronouncements...*

And I want to say to you what that former slave said to her son, "Take a long look, honey. He died for you."

It reminds me of the mother and daughter who were on their way to the zoo. It was Easter week, and as they drove past church lawn after church lawn the little girl counted up the number of crosses. Finally she asked, "*Mom, how many times did Jesus die?*"

Her mother assured her, "Only once dear."

"*Then why are there so many crosses?*" The mom replied, "To help us remember how much Jesus loved us. He died on the cross in our place." The little girl was appalled - taken back - up in arms! She shouted, "*How could we ever forget something like that!*"

Indeed! How could we ever forget the cross of Christ? Yet we can, and we do. After the cross why would you ever doubt God's love for you... *but do you?*

After the cross how can we question His goodness, and grace, and mercy towards us? In light of the cross how can any of us go to bed lonely and think no one cares? *Hey, take a long look honey, Jesus died for you!*

This evening I want to start with a statement that Jesus uttered from the cross. He spoke these words towards the end of His gruesome ordeal.

According to Mark's Gospel the crucifixion was an all day affair. At about 9:00 AM the nails were driven into His hands and feet - the cross hoisted into its posthole.

Around noon the sky went black, and for three hours the world quaked in darkness... Jesus died shortly after 3:00 pm. And it was just after this second dawn of the day - right before He died - He made this utterance.

What Jesus says in John 19 isn't a long and detailed statement. There's nothing cryptic or mysterious about it. Initially, it doesn't appear particularly profound.

In fact, at first sound it appears to be more like a man's *grunt* than a carefully crafted communication.

But in John 19:28 Jesus cried from the cross through a parched throat - a dry mouth - a dehydrated body. He said, **“I thirst!”** And we say, *“No big deal. He was just thirsty. We’d be thirsty too in similar circumstances?”*

But tonight, I want to suggest this *“guttural grunt”* was really a monumental proclamation. It marked a turning point in the work of Jesus on that rugged cross.

Verse 29 tells us how the Roman executioners responded to Jesus’ thirst, **“Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.”** Hyssop was a leafy branch, they used to mop his lips.

But recall this was not the first time, while on the cross, Jesus was offered something to moisten His tongue... In Mark 15:23 we’re told just before they dropped the cross into its place, **“they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.”**

Myrrh was a narcotic. It was the ancient equivalent of morphine. It numbed the victim and helped him tolerate the searing pain of the crucifixion. For Jesus to forego the elixir was like a man scheduled for open heart surgery turning down the appropriate anesthesia.

Yet, on the cross, Jesus rejected *all pain relief.*

Our Lord had work to do, and He needed control of all His faculties. Only at the end of His ordeal, did He take the “*sour wine*” (*which was minus the myrrh*) to moisten His lips so He could utter His final words.

According to our text, verse 28, Jesus sought this relief for himself, and acknowledged His own need, only after *all things had been accomplished and the Scripture fulfilled* - then, did Jesus say, “*I thirst.*”

In reality, this seeming “*grunt,*” points out the extremes to which Jesus went to *confront* our sin, and bear the full *brunt* of our punishment. Jesus suffered in our place *physically, and emotionally, and spiritually.*

He paid *our penalty in full.*

Despite the fact His throat was dry and His lips were cracked, Jesus waited until the work was finished before He concerned Himself with His own needs...

Even today, with Hollywood’s various depictions of the crucifixion, it’s still hard for us to really imagine what an actual one was like. Today, crosses are made of polished gold or silver, and fashioned into jewelry.

But for an ancient Jew the cross represented the most hideous form of torture and execution the world has ever devised. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, who saw firsthand his share of crucifixions, referred to them, as, “*the most wretched of deaths.*”

Roman orator, Cicero, called the cross a “cruel and disgusting penalty.” A Roman jurist, Julius Paulus, ranked crucifixion the worst form of execution - ahead of burning, and beheading, and death by wild beasts.

Even members of the early church were repulsed by the cross. The cross was banned from depiction in the arts for the first four centuries of church history.

Not until the Roman Emperor Constantine abolished the cross as a form of execution was it transformed into an emblem of the church. Author CS Lewis once observed, “the crucifixion did not become common in art until all who had seen a real one had died off.”

If you were standing before a live crucifixion *you'd shiver in horror - you'd turn your head - it would turn your stomach* - for weeks you'd have nightmares.

The only mention Jesus made of His physical status on the cross was this simple utterance, “I thirst!”

But Psalm 22 provides a prophetic account of what He actually experienced. The psalmist cries out these gut-wrenching words in verses 14-15, “I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; you have brought Me to the dust of death.”

These verses are not for the squeamish.

The body of Jesus was racked with a fever. He was dehydrated - his flesh was made brittle by exhaustion. Jesus compares Himself to a broken piece of pottery. His mouth is dry. His lips are bleeding and parched.

It's so ironic, the One who promised us all, "If any man thirst let him come to me and drink," now suffers from a lack of fluids... **Jesus thirsts physically so He can quench our spiritual thirst!** All He tastes is dust... so we can taste the sweet mercies of God

Psalm 22 elaborates even further. In verse 17 Jesus says, "They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me."

The body of Jesus is now stretched out on the splintered wood - *you can count His ribs.*

He's suspended from the frame. Lacerated wounds support His weight. His temperature rises. Seven inch iron spikes protrude into His hands and feet.

Medical doctor and historian, Truman Davis, describes the pain the crucified experienced. Follow along on the screen as I read it to you... "The cross is placed on the ground and the exhausted man is quickly thrown backwards with his shoulders against the wood.

The legionnaire drives a heavy, square wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly he moves to the other side and repeats the action.

The cross is lifted into place.

The left foot is pressed backward against the right foot, and with both feet extended, toes down, a nail is driven through the arch of each, leaving the knees flexed. The victim is crucified.

As he slowly sags down, his weight is held up by the nails in the wrists. Excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms, and explodes in the brain.

As he pushes himself upward to take a breath, he places the full weight on the nail through his feet.

Again he feels the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the bones of the feet. As the arms fatigue, cramps sweep through the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain.

With these cramps come the inability to push himself upward to breathe. Air is drawn into the lungs but not exhaled. He fights to raise himself to get even a small breath. Finally carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the blood stream and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in life-giving oxygen.

Hours of limitless pain, cycles of twisting, joint-rending cramps, intermittent partial asphyxiation, searing pain - as tissue is torn from a lacerated back as he moves up and down against the rough timber.

Then another agony begins: a deep crushing pain in the chest - as the pericardium fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over - the loss of tissue fluids reach a critical level - the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues - the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air.

He can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues... Finally he can allow his body to die."

Why such an awful death? Why crucifixion? Why not the lethal injection of a drug, or an electric chair?

Something more humane - a means that's quick and painless? Surely, the Son of God deserves to die with dignity? Why does it have to be so bloody and brutal?

But for Jesus to die in our place - it was necessary for Him to bear what we deserve! *His punishment* shows the depth and severity of *our rebellion!*

Our problem is we take sin so lightly! We gloss over and wink at attitudes that break God's heart. The cross sobers us... *our sin cost God His only Son!*

The truth of the matter is that man has not simply side-stepped God's will, or strayed from the straight and narrow. Mankind's rebellion is the equivalent of a moral and spiritual free fall from 12,000 feet.

Unless God intervenes, the human race will splatter on the sidewalk. *Imagine the force of the impact when a body slams the Earth from 12,000 feet!...* yet this is just a fraction of the hit Jesus took for you and me!

There were two ways a crucified man actually died.

The first was by suffocation. This was hastened by the Romans. They broke the man's legs with a club so he could no longer push himself up to breathe.

That's why when the soldiers came to Jesus they left His bones intact. *He was already dead.* Not one of Messiah's bone was broken - a fulfillment of Scripture.

The second means of death was cardiac arrest.

During a crucifixion the victim's blood flowed into their lower extremities. The pulse rate doubled and the blood pressure dropped in half... the heart was working overtime to pump the syrupy blood. Eventually the heart muscle exploded in the victim's chest.

This is why when the spear was thrust in Jesus' side out gushed blood and water. Physicians tell us the only time blood breaks down into water and plasma is when a heart ruptures. *Literally, Jesus died of a broken heart.*

And His heart still breaks over those who stubbornly resist His love!... If you've been resisting of late, I pray that tonight you'll give in, and open your heart to Him.

In His body, Jesus bore the full brunt of our sin - yet, the consequences of our sin are not just *physical*.

Sin also damages us *emotionally and spiritually*.

In fact, the essence of death is separation. When a person dies physically their spirit is separated from their body. But the worse type of death is spiritual death - *where the spirit of man is separated from God.*

From the beginning, sin produced spiritual death.

And for us to be reunited with the Father, His only Son had to experience this separation in our stead...

By far, the severest pain Jesus experienced on the cross was the spiritual pain caused by the separation that occurred between He and His Father.

Author Tim Keller writes, “On the cross the body of Jesus was being destroyed in the worst possible way, but that was a flea bite compared to what was happening to His soul...” Keller goes on to make the observation, “The longer, deeper, and more intimate the relationship, the more torturous is any separation.”

It’s painful when friends break up... It’s especially painful when a long-standing marriage goes sour...

But imagine the pain that occurred when Jesus cried from the cross, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani” - the phrase was Aramaic, the language of the day. It meant “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

No one who had been there would ever forget the dramatic moment when Jesus uttered this cry.

For three hours a solar eclipse shrouded the land.

From noon until 3:00 in the afternoon - the hot Middle Eastern sun, usually at its peak brightness, refused to shine. **It was a midnight at midday!**

It was as if heaven had stopped smiling, and all the Earth was left to tremble in fear and darkness.

Earlier in John 8:29, Jesus had said, “He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” But now suddenly, Jesus feels the Father's rejection.

He who enjoyed perfect harmony with the Father since the beginning of time suddenly feels the pain of isolation. Here is the most mysterious, yet most monumental moment, in all of human history.

When Jesus uttered the words, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" we hear the *Savior shriek*. Suddenly the sin of all mankind is thrust upon His *sacrificial shoulders*. The *Lamb* receives His *load*.

Jesus is the *spotless, unblemished* lamb of God. Morally, his heart is as tender as a baby's soft, sensitive skin. He's flawless and innocent.

It would've been a shock to His system to bear a single speck of sin - but imagine the piercing fright, the staggering horror - of absorbing the sin of the whole world! For the first time Jesus feels the weight of sin.

The sin of the rapist, the serial killer, the child molester, the secret gossip - the sin of the Nazis and Isis and slave traders - of all mankind - your sin and mine - was suddenly thrust on His innocent shoulders.

1 Corinthians 5:21 declares the stunning truth, "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*"

Jesus was God, and never ceased being God. He had lived forever with the Father in warm, unbroken fellowship. From the beginning of time nothing had

interrupted their *holy harmony*. Yet for a moment on the cross the *Son of God* became the *orphaned Child*.

In a way no human being can comprehend, *God became estranged from God*. The Son was separated from the Father so you and I could be united with Him.

In the spring of 1946, Los Alamos, New Mexico was the US testing center for the development of the atomic bomb. A young scientist, *Louis Slotin*, was conducting a dangerous, yet somewhat routine experiment.

The purpose of the procedure was to measure the Uranium 235 required for a chain reaction.

Slotin would push together two hemispheres of uranium, and just as the mass grew to the point of self-sustainment - *the critical mass* - he would pry them apart with the screwdriver, halting the reaction.

That's what usually happened, but on this day Slotin's experiment went haywire. As he tried to pry apart the Uranium, his screwdriver slipped, and suddenly the room was ablaze with a bluish haze.

Yet rather than duck to protect himself, Louis Slotin cared more about the seven other people in the room.

He grabbed the Uranium, and pulled it apart with his bare hands, exposing himself to the lethal radiation.

Slotin's bravery saved the lives of his colleagues. Yet nine days later, Louis died a hideously painful death.

And what Louis Slotin did for those workers - in a sense, Jesus did for all humanity. Rather than duck to protect Himself, He exposed Himself to the full blaze of sin's harmful radiation. Jesus took the *brutal brunt* of sin's critical mass, and suffered an agonizing death.

Yet, in His act of bravery He halted sin's chain reaction. On the cross, Jesus broke the power of sin!

There was work to do *first...* before Jesus concerned Himself with His own *thirst...* In the OT, sheep were sacrificed for their Shepherd, but on the cross of Jesus the Shepherd was sacrificed for His sheep.

They say the Secret Service Agents responsible for the President's personal safety are folks who would be willing to jump in front of a bullet if necessary to save the President's life. Well, on the cross of Christ, the President of the Universe took a bullet for His people.

And that's why I've enrolled in His service!

John 19:28 tells us, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst!'" Finally, Jesus

was free to concern Himself with *His own thirst* because He had done what was necessary to quench our spiritual thirst.

In bearing the full brunt of sin Jesus paid its penalties to the nth degree. Notice, the very next phrase in verse 30, with a moistened tongue Jesus said, “It is finished!”

Literally, it reads “*Tetelestai*” or “paid in full.”

According to the other Gospels, with the help of the sour wine Jesus managed one more statement. His last words were, “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.” No one took Jesus’ life. He gave it voluntary.

Now that the work had been finished, and the price paid, Jesus could release His spirit into the Father’s hands, assured that His sacrifice had been accepted!

The work Jesus accomplished on the cross was monumental. It was colossal! He built a bridge from God to man. Jesus made a way to stop mankind’s free fall, and return us to the Father who loves us.

On the cross, Jesus didn’t *just* forgive our sin - but in doing so, He did all that needed to be done, for us to experience and possess all God’s goodness and truth.

Recently, I read where a suspension bridge has been built connecting two Japanese islands.

The Akashi Bridge is 3,911 meters in length - over two miles. It's the world's longest suspension bridge. But it's still tiny compared to the bridge Jesus built.

It was constructed with a piece of wood, probably no longer than 12, maybe 15 feet - but what happened on that cross formed a bridge from Heaven to Earth!

Imagine a bridge *from man to God, from death to life, from dark to light, from pain to peace, from hate to love, from loneliness to joy...* it wasn't until this bridge was built that Jesus was finally able to acknowledge His own thirst, and ask for a simple drink. *There was work He had to do!* And now *that work* has been done!

In the early morning hours of April 26, 1865, the train carrying the body of Abraham Lincoln rolled into Albany, NY. The former slave knew this might be the last opportunity her son would have to pay his respects to the man who had done so much to gain his freedom.

She hoisted him as high as she could, and said to the boy, **“Take a long look, honey. He died for you!”**

And this is what I hope I've done tonight. Gotten you a little closer to the events that occurred on that old rugged cross... ***Take a long look... Jesus died for you!***