

Matthew 27:50-54
Good Friday
Lord Jesus, Abide with Me
Life through Jesus' Death

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⁵⁰ When Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split ⁵² and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

The Christian church is in mourning today as she remembers the day upon which the hour of death for Jesus had come. The author of one of our Good Friday hymns put it this way, *Oh sorrow dread! God's Son is dead! Matthew's gospel tells us that when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He gave up His spirit.* Again, the songwriter voices it well when he writes, *Oh, darkest woe! O tears, forth flow! Has earth so sad a wonder? God the Father's only Son now is buried yonder.* And yet even today as we commemorate the world's darkest hour, we feel quite unmistakably an underlying, solemn joy. This is the paradox of Good Friday. We mourn a death no less than that of God's own Son, and yet we rejoice that by that death came life.

Death itself is frightful and horrible. We can well imagine the sorrow and grief that filled the hearts of Mary, John, and the others who were present at Jesus' crucifixion. How heartrending to see Him who was their Friend and Helper, their Lord and their Master, now helpless and dead.

Only a few months ago on Christmas Eve we heard the joyful news of the Savior who was born in Bethlehem, and we stood with great joy at the scene of His humble birth. Today we stand in deepest sorrow beneath the cross where He gave up His life. The lowly manger in all its simplicity and beauty gives way to the cross in all its shame horror.

It was truly a mournful and dreadful scene on that first Good Friday. There Jesus hung, nailed to the tree of the cross, blood flowing from the wounds on His back, His thorn-crowned head, and from His pierced hands and feet. We hear His dreadful cry, **My God My God why have You forsaken Me?** (Mt 27:46). Even the light of the sun was taken away and an unusual darkness enveloped the land. Jesus was experiencing the excruciating torment of hell itself.

Yet when His struggle was ended, Jesus said, **Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit**, and then He died. Though Jesus had endured the most intense and dreadful suffering, His death was a thing of beauty. He closed His eyes in death. His suffering was ended. His battle with Satan was over. His death was peaceful, comforting, and reassuring. Jesus fell asleep in the arms of His Father as a little child would do. **Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.** He wasn't afraid to face His Father, because He had perfectly fulfilled the Father's will. He had no words of bitterness or reproach for His Father because of the terrible ordeal He had gone through.

Jesus' death is a model for us. In death we do not need to worry about our body. The important thing is that our souls are in God's keeping. And when our souls are in God's keeping, we have nothing to fear, nothing to dread. On the contrary, a new joy awaits us. We have the joy of knowing that we are His children and heirs of everlasting life. That is why Jesus suffered and died for us! That's why He endured the very torments of hell for us! That is why we particularly cherish the season of Lent, because it is the season that takes us to the very heart of the gospel.

Listen to a whole cloud of witnesses emphasizing the need, the importance, the meaning of our Savior's suffering and death. Isaiah who lived some 700 years before Jesus was even testified, **Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.... He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities.... The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.... For the transgressions of my people He was stricken... and He bore the sin of many** (Is 53).

John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Savior exclaimed, **Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!** (Jn 1:29).

Jesus Himself made it clear during His ministry, **the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many** (Mk 10:45).

The Apostle John, who had walked with and learned from the Savior Himself, said, **the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, purifies us from all sin**, and a few verses later, **He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world** (1 Jn 1:7; 2:2).

Saint Paul, the one-time enemy of the gospel who later by the grace of God became the great Apostle to the Gentiles, boldly proclaimed the Jesus Christ as Lord to all with whom he came into contact. He testified to the Corinthians, **I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified**, and to the Romans, **God demonstrated His love toward us in this, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us**, and finally to the Ephesians, **in Jesus we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace** (1 Cor 2:2; Rom 5:8; Eph 1:7).

So it goes, on and on. Many more passages could be quoted to show the clear and unmistakable testimony of those who knew Him, who were called by Him to preach His word, and were led by the Spirit to write the sacred Scriptures. One and all unhesitatingly and in perfect harmony witness that Christ died as the sinner's Substitute—that His blood was shed and that His life was lived and laid down to atone for the sins of the world—so that we might live with Him in all eternity.

On Good Friday, we commemorate the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reminded of the suffering and pain that was His. With hymns and prayers, we join the disciples in mourning His cruel fate. Yet, joy fills our hearts because we know Jesus did all of this for us. We know that we have life through Christ's suffering and death. What words can better describe this than the words of explanation from our Catechism to the Second Article of the Creed: I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. All this He did that I should be His own, and live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Thank God for the suffering and death which our Lord Jesus willingly endured in His passion. We have life through His death. For us, hell and the powers of hell were conquered on Calvary. The full fury of God's righteous wrath against sin was endured and paid for by Jesus. So our mourning on this day gives way to joy. Now we can confidently look forward to the joy of heaven and need never fear the dread terrors of hell.

Nor need we ever fear death, because when Jesus died, He was paying the wages of sin for us. His death was our death. When He gave up His spirit on the cross, you and I died our real death. What confronts us now at the end of life is no longer the wages of sin, that debt was paid by Jesus on that first Good Friday. Now we can rejoice in the assurance of our Lord, **I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die** (Jn 11:25).

It is significant that at the moment of the Messiah's death three unusual signs are carefully noted by Matthew. The first sign happened in the temple, God's dwelling place on earth. The veil of the temple which hid the Most Holy Place from sight—a reminder to God's people that their sins separated them from God—was torn in half from top to bottom. This signaled the end of the Old Testament priesthood that had mediated between God and man. Jesus replaced it as the one and perfect mediator of the New Testament. Our sins are paid for. No longer do they separate us from God, we can now go to Him directly through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second sign happened in the realm of the dead. Christ's death put an end to the dread power of death. The earth itself shook, rocks split apart, and graves were opened as a number of the faithful woke from the sleep of death to serve as a visible witness that death had lost its sting and that Christ's death means life for those who place their trust in Him.

The third and final sign happened among the living. Jesus' death had also torn down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile as the growth of His New Testament Church would soon demonstrate. But even there, at the foot of the cross, the Roman centurion with his soldiers, a member of a Gentile nation, acclaimed Jesus as God's Son. Whether he knew it or not, his exclamation summarized the very heart of the gospel: Because God's Son died on the cross, forgiveness and life and salvation are ours. And He's done this not only for you and for me for all who place their trust in Him.

And so, it is good and right for us to stand beneath the cross as well and learn anew what Jesus accomplished for us through His suffering and death. Amen.

**Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, Abide with me!**