

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

We are about to look at a person who has gone where no person has ever gone before. We are going to enter a study where the most pain anyone has ever experienced will be expressed. Jesus entered the pit of hell itself for our sake when God the Father turned His back on His Beloved Son, forsaking Him, for the Father in all His holiness could not look upon the sinfulness of humanity, our sins, placed on Jesus. There is no pit of hell so deep that Jesus Himself has not already been there. The very heart of Jesus cries out in each word He spoke from the cross. In the words of Jesus today we hear the anguish of His very soul.

Let us pray. Jesus, thank You for descending into hell so we can ascend into heaven. Thank you for enduring the darkness so we can live in the light. Thank you for drinking the cup of the Father's wrath that we might drink the cup of joy. Because You were forsaken we are forgiven. Thank You for bearing our sins, our sorrows, and carrying our griefs on the cross. Please speak to us Your word this very hour. Help us as your servants to listen. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

The worst pain I have seen not only as a pastor but as a human being is excruciating emotional pain. I have either read of a person's emotional trauma in a book or listened to a person pour out his or her pain with words and unstoppable tears. Emotional pain, the pain of sorrow, grief, abuse of all sorts, abandonment, being terrorized by a friend or family member, is even too much to think about.

I say this for this reason. God the Father was not just existing somewhere in heaven enjoying Himself as Jesus was suffering a tortuous death. It was no accident that Jesus was on the cross. The greatest pain of all was pain the Father inflicted upon Jesus. Isaiah writes, "He was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" (Isiah 53:4). Isaiah also says, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him; he has put Him to grief." It is also true that the Father's love for Jesus is perfect in every way. I believe God the Father in heaven endured the suffering of a loving

parent as He watched His beloved Son, knowing that He would be the one who inflicted the most pain. Loving parents do not inflict horrible pain. The Father and Son planned for this in eternity past and Jesus came to fulfill His Father's will. You and I are put on this earth to carry out the Father's will for our lives. To take up our cross is to live for God and not for ourselves carrying out God's will, not our wills. When the sin of the world was placed upon Jesus, the fullness of God's wrath was pointed at Jesus and Jesus drank the full cup of God's wrath. I would have aimed the wrath at the people whose sin put Jesus on the cross, who nailed Jesus to the cross, namely you and me. Our sins put Him there and we deserve the cup of God's wrath. Jesus drank it all. All to Him we owe. God the Father exercised the greatest amount of patience ever by punishing Jesus, a punishment we rightly deserved, a punishment our sins brought upon Jesus. I would have aimed or pointed the wrath at everyone else, not the One who never sinned. God's patience is something else indeed.

The cross is the greatest proof of all that God the Father loves us. There is no question, no ambiguity, no doubt at all that the Father loves us. The plan to save us was agreed upon in eternity past. Jesus was not a helpless victim. Jesus willingly accepted His role of being the final sacrifice for sin. Please hear this. Jesus willingly drank in the fullness of God's wrath, so we as believers will never be touched by the eternal wrath of God. God's wrath can never touch you.

I was told this week that there are a lot of people here in pain. Some are experiencing physical pain, others are struggling with emotional pain, anxiety, worry, stress, deep grief, and more. The causes do not need to be mentioned for you are all too aware of the causes, the circumstances that weigh heavily on your soul. The deepest insight I have ever learned about Jesus on the cross is this. When Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" Jesus was in the most excruciating pain any person will ever experience. The physical pain was not the worst of it. The emotional pain of being forsaken by the Father was by far the worst

pain of all. The Father abandoned Jesus. The Father turned away from Jesus. The length of Jesus pain felt like an eternity and in a sense, it was an eternity, for there is no such thing as time in hell. Jesus sunk into the deepest of pits, hell itself, when the Father spurned Him. In terms of minutes or hours we cannot define the length, for Jesus was beyond time when He bore our sin. This is what gets me the most. Jesus hung there in complete trust that the Father would raise Him from the dead. Jesus understood the necessity of the Father's wrath. Jesus understood He would soon be restored in fellowship with the Father after the Father's wrath was satisfied (propitiated). The wrath of the Father would put Jesus into the deepest part of hell. The love of the Father would place Jesus in the highest place of honor in heaven. No one will be honored more in heaven than Jesus because no one has suffered more than Jesus.

In your agony please be assured that the Father's love will never leave you. It is impossible for God to forsake you even when your spouse may have a terminal illness. Our place is to be like Jesus and continually trust in God that yes, God will rescue you. God will never let go of you, and your time of suffering is only for a brief time. God will turn your worst of suffering into His greatest blessing as we cling to God, rely on God, and actively trust in God. While suffering it is often when we give to God our greatest attention, it is amazing when the bottom falls out how many people return to church. God often uses our suffering to get our attention unto Him. It is then that God is doing His most intricate work in our lives. God knows exactly what He is doing in our lives. Please don't give up on God. Please don't think God has turned against you. God cannot turn against you for He promises never to leave you nor forsake you and nothing can separate you from the love of God found in Christ Jesus (Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:39).

In the excruciating pain of the cross Jesus never lost trust in the Father. I know this to be true because had Jesus lost trust in the Father, Jesus no longer would have been the spotless, sinless Lamb of God. Jesus hung there in complete trust in the Father. This is exactly what we

are called to do. No matter what, keep trusting. It is the only way. There is no other way. Jesus showed us the way most clearly on the cross and we are able to keep trusting because no matter what is happening to us, God has a plan to use it for our good and for God's glory. Jesus endured it all for the joy set before Him in glory (Hebrews 12:2). We too endure it all for the great day of joy to come.

From 9:00 in the morning until noon, Jesus hung on the cross in the morning sunlight. The Bible tells us that at noon until 3:00 in the afternoon darkness came over the land (Matthew 27:45). For three hours it was midnight black. A supernatural act of God blocked the sunlight. In the Bible darkness is always associated with the judgment of God for great sin (ibid. pg. 74). Sin was being judged and nature showed a word picture of the activity of God. Those who were so cruel to Jesus, having Him crucified, stood in darkness at the cross. It was in this cover of darkness that Jesus bore our sins, carried the guilt and shame of our sins; Jesus, judged in our place. Think of all the sins you have ever committed; it was those sins that Jesus bore in complete darkness. The light returned when Jesus breathed His last. Our sins had been atoned for. The work of Christ was completed. "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Jesus had always called God, Father. With our sin upon Jesus, the perfect fellowship they had known for an eternity was broken. Jesus cries out words from Psalm 22, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me." With the loss of the fellowship of the Father's Presence to help, Jesus endured to the end without sin this magnified the horror of what was happening to Him (ibid. pg. 75). Yes, these were words of great anguish, but they were also words of trust claiming God to be His God even though the fellowship was absent.

God's holiness demands perfection. God cannot tolerate sin. Jesus met all of the demands of the Father's holiness, the perfect righteousness of God. Only the Perfect (God) could save that which is imperfect (us). Jesus met every requirement for us. The holy righteousness of Christ now resides in every Christian.

What are we to take from this on this Good Friday afternoon?

1. Jesus did experience the depths of hell so we can experience the heights of heaven.
2. Jesus did bear all of your sins (mine too). All of your sins have been completely forgiven and God looks at you as if you never sinned. I may call you a dirty rotten sinner, but God does not. He calls you a saint.
3. No person, absolutely no one in the universe has suffered more than Jesus. Any amount that you suffer, Jesus understands completely. There is no pit so deep that His love is not deeper still.
4. Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil now belongs to you.
5. This was all planned by Father and Son in eternity past. God has always loved you with an everlasting love and yes, underneath are the everlasting arms. Amen and Amen.