

The Crucifixion

Opening Prayer:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

(Psalm 22:1-5)

Scripture Reading:

Mark 15:25-39

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: **THE KING OF THE JEWS**. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!"

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Video Presentation – Session “The Crucifixion”*Key Insights:*

- ✓ The Orthodox tradition makes elaborate use of icons of brass; they are a reminder of why most Protestants often find these holy sites overwhelming and ostentatious and why they favor Gordon’s Cavalry as a place to remember the Crucifixion.
- ✓ The cross would have been assembled at the site of the Crucifixion. Archaeological evidence indicates that the victims of crucifixion had their feet nailed into the sides of the cross, straddling it. The small ledge was not for the feet but acted as a seat, encouraging the victim to rest upon it, thus pulling at the nails piercing the wrists. Remember, the aim of crucifixion was to inflict as much pain as possible upon the victim for as long as possible.
- ✓ Romans crosses were six to nine feet high. We tend to imagine Jesus hanging high up, but in reality Jesus was likely only a foot or so above those who stood around his cross.

Questions for Discussion:

1. In his sermon excerpt, Adam says that the cross is a reminder that (1) we need saving, (2) God experiences suffering because of our brokenness, (3) God has chosen to be merciful and forgiving toward us, and (4) God loves us. How do you respond to those reminders?
2. What does the cross mean to you?

Book Discussion:

In the sacrificial offering theory of the Atonement, we view the Crucifixion through the lens of the Old Testament’s sacrificial system. In his death, Jesus acted as the high priest representing all of humanity. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, a title pointing to his role as “representative human being.” He was God in the flesh, revealing God to us; but he was also fully human, representing a new humanity that reflected what we were meant to be as human beings. In this capacity, he became our priest and intercessor with God. He offered a sacrifice to God to atone for humanity’s sin, to reconcile us with the Father. He offered not a goat or a bull, but himself as the Son of Man and as our high priest. In essence, he said, “Father, for these creatures, so small, so broken, so easily lured into hurting one another, for these men and women who do evil to one another and turn their backs on you – for them I offer myself to you to atone for their sins.” (Pgs. 102-103)

- Describe your understanding of the sacrificial offering theory of Atonement as described in this passage. What aspects of this theory aid or hinder your understanding of the death of Jesus?

Like Psalm 22, nearly all the lament psalms – those that complain because God seems to be nowhere near – end with an affirmation of faith. The very act of praying a complaint psalm is an affirmation of faith. When darkness seems to prevail in your life, it takes faith even to talk to God and complain to him! The last words of Jesus from the cross recorded in the Gospel of Luke reflect Jesus' absolute trust in God: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." This is also a model of prayer for all of us when we are afraid, when we are sick, when we face our own death. This prayer says, "I commit myself to you, O God. In my living and in my dying, in the good times and in the bad, whatever I am and have, I place in your hands, O God, for your safekeeping." (Pg. 112)

- When was the last time you complained to God out of an experience of despair or darkness and yet ended up affirming your trust in God? Describe how you moved from lament to trust.

Wrapping Up:

According to Adam Hamilton, it is now believed that most crosses were not much more than nine feet tall. In that case, Jesus would have only been three feet or so above the ground. Imagine that you are standing or sitting just three feet from the spikes that hold Jesus' bloody feet in place on the cross. What image most captivates your attention? What do you hear? How do you respond?

Closing Prayer:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)

For Further Study

Bible Study and Discussion

Traditionally, Christians have revered the four Gospel accounts of the words Jesus spoke while on the cross. Read aloud each of these “seven last words of Christ” and after each sentence ask yourself: How do Jesus’ words give meaning to the Gospels’ claim of who Jesus is?

- “Here is your mother” (John 19:27)
- “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)
- “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)
- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1)
- “I am thirsty” (John 19:28)
- “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)
- “It is finished” (John 19:30)