

Good Friday Service

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0:00] Please do take your seats. I don't know if you were to reflect on your life, however many years that's been, I wonder! what some of the standout moments would be?

If you were to write an autobiography of your own life, what moments would you focus on? In the Bible, we have four books on the life of Jesus, but those four books combined give us very little about his birth, and they give us even less about his childhood.

He's not going to include virtually nothing of most of his adult years. There's much more in his public ministry over the course of a few years, but even then, the focal point of every account, the end to which each of the gospel writers wants to draw our attention to is not his life, but his death.

We've just heard that account from Mark's gospel that Kirsten and Diane have read for us, where the death of Jesus has been set in the foreground for the whole of the latter half of the book.

Sixteen chapters long, from chapter 9 through to chapter 16, Jesus has his eyes fixed firmly on the cross. Throughout those chapters, Jesus' words that dominate the narrative, that's probably what we'd expect, isn't it?

[1:36] Not only is this a book all about Jesus, but Jesus tells us right at the start of Mark's gospel that that is what he came to do, to preach, to speak, to tell people about the kingdom of God so that they might repent and believe in him.

Unsurprisingly, we have in this gospel a lot of Jesus speaking. I'm not a great advocate of red-letter Bibles, where the words of Jesus are recorded in red and everything else is in black, but if you were to look at one of those Bibles and to look at chapters 9 to 14 of Mark, you would see a lot of red, because Jesus does a lot of preaching.

But then when you should turn the page to Mark chapter 15, the chapter we have heard this evening, you would see virtually nothing but black.

Four words to Pilate at the very start of that chapter. You have said so. And then, silence. Silence. Silence. Silence. Until, as he hung on the cross, Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani.

[3:00] I'm assuming very few of us here are fluent in Aramaic, and yet many of us will know exactly what those words mean. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Preaching is what Jesus came to do. The cross is where Jesus came to go. And yet, when we get there, there is a pregnant silence except for those four words.

We know what they mean, Mark tells us that. Some of us, I'm sure, also know where they come from. That they were written a thousand years before Jesus by King David, God's chosen covenant king, in the face of inescapable pain, surrounded and suffering at the hands of enemies.

He wrote those words that Jesus utters on the cross, recorded for us in Psalm 22. But more than Psalm 22 being a psalm of David, they are a psalm of Christ.

Here's a great quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a German theologian who was killed by the Nazis near the end of the Second World War. He wrote, The psalms that will not cross our lips as prayers, those that make us falter and offend us, make us suspect that here someone else is praying.

[4:38] That the one who has come to such infinite depths of suffering is none other than Jesus Christ himself. It is he who is praying here.

On the cross, Jesus speaks from Psalm 22, not because he sympathizes with what David went through, but because David experienced something of what Christ was enduring.

And so just for a few moments this evening, we are going to meditate on this psalm together, this psalm of Christ, his psalm that he was meditating on, on the cross of Calvary.

What words that he himself took upon his lips, as painful as every word on the cross would have been to utter, so that we would hear, in and through this psalm, what he was silently enduring on that cross for our sake.

So we're going to read this psalm together. We're going to read the whole psalm. It's a fairly long psalm, but it is worth listening to, because these are the words of Jesus.

[5:47] It's page 457, if you're in one of the blue church Bibles. Psalm 22, reading from verse 1.

Let us hear Christ through these words. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted. They trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried and were rescued. In you they trusted, and were not put to shame. But I am a worm, and not a man, scorned by mankind, and despised by the people.

[6:57] All who see me mock me. They make mouths at me. They wag their heads. He trusts in the Lord.

Let him deliver him. Let him rescue him, for he delights in him. Yet you are he who took me from the womb. You made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

Many bulls encompass me, strong bulls of fashion surround me. They open wide their mouths at me like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joints. My heart is like wax. It is wet-melted within my breast. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws. You lay me in the dust of death.

[8:08] For dogs encompass me. A company of evildoers encircles me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones.

They stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O Lord, do not be far off.

O you, my help, come quickly to my aid. Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the mouth of the lion.

You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will tell of your name to my brothers. In the midst of the congregation, I will praise you.

You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel. For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but he has heard when he cried to him.

[9:17] From you comes my praise in the great congregation. My vows I will perform before those who fear him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied.

Those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever. All the ends of the earth shall remember, and turn to the Lord.

And all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. All the prosperous of the earth, eat and worship before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive.

Posterity shall serve him. It shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

Just three things I want us to hear. In this psalm. Three things to hear as we hear the voice of Jesus on the cross. I want us to first of all hear, perhaps most obviously, his suffering.

[10:34] Right from the start of this psalm, Christ cries out, I think with an anguish, we simply cannot fathom. Because he is experiencing in his humanity a true sense of being utterly forsaken by God.

Forsaken in the Bible is the language of a covenant curse. Not just being distant from someone, but bearing the penalty of those who have broken God's covenant.

that is what God had said would be the price of faithlessness, of turning away from him, and yet here is Christ, the righteous and faithful son of God, being forsaken by the Father, bearing the curse that he had not caused.

As we sung earlier, how great the pain of searing loss as the Father turns his face away. Jesus cries out in anguish because of what he has lost, but there is no response.

We know something, don't we, of moments of great pain, of sorrow, of terror, when we cry out to those who love us most. And we long for an answer.

[12:09] Jesus cries out here, but there is no response. And that is the pain that anguishes Jesus the most, having had nails hammered through his hands and feet, being slowly suffocated by his own weight, enduring the cruelest form of execution a barbaric empire could muster up.

Yet this is the cry of pain on Christ's lips. In the midst of an unfathomable physical pain, this is what causes Jesus the most anguish.

Not the nails in his hands and feet, but the curse of God that he was bearing. Our curse, because of our sin, enduring the forsakenness of the Father that we deserved.

As he endures that most painful loss, though everything else in his experience multiplies his misery. Verse 6, I'm a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by people.

He is treated as subhuman, mocked, shamed, publicly humiliated, and there is no escape. Verse 12, you have this picture of bulls encompassing him, strong bulls, like ravening and roaring lions.

[13:34] They open their mouths. Think of the vividness of the imagery. Put yourself at the heart of that. Surrounded by bulls and lions, ready to devour you.

And see the contrast between the strength of Jesus' enemies, those who encircle him, and the weakness of Jesus in his humanity. My bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax. Verse 17, I can count all my bones. He can see his bones through his flesh, such as his weakness.

My strength is dried up. You lay me in the dust of death. Like wounded prey, watching lions circling around, he is staring into the eyes of an agonizing death, and knowing that for our sake, there is no escape from it.

They gloat over him while gambling for his clothes. The cloak torn from his back is the only thing they see any value in. His garments hold value, he does not.

[14:59] Forsaken, mocked, scorned, despised, humiliated, encircled, dehumanized, deemed worthless.

That is Christ's experience as he hangs on the tree, forsaken by God, humiliated by people, ensnared by prowling enemies. Here we have an insight into the suffering that Christ really and truly did experience on the cross, and it plumbs depths we simply cannot reach.

We might well in our lives have swam in the shallow waters of some of this suffering, suffering. But only Christ has reached the bottom. It was more than physical pain, it was more than the worst public shame because it meant being forsaken by the Father and bearing the covenant curse of God's righteous wrath towards sinful humanity.

All while those he came to save gloated over him. There really and truly has never been suffering like it.

but neither has there been faith like it. Second note I want us to hear ringing through this psalm, in the midst of the greatest suffering, our Savior holds on to an even greater faith.

[16:27] I don't know if you noticed as we read through that psalm, as we heard Christ's suffering, throughout the suffering, we also hear his unshakable trust in God.

in the same God that he feels forsaken by. And significantly, his faith penetrates the suffering.

He does not suffer, come out the other side, and then return to faith. No, as he suffers, he continues through it all, expressing an absolute confidence in God.

God. While he experiences the pain of God's silence, he nevertheless says, verse 3, yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

He remembers that those who put their trust in God are not ultimately put to shame. While the people mock him, while they treat him as a worm and not a man, he knows that throughout all of his human years, God has been there by his side.

[17:29] Verse 9, Christ knows there has never been a moment when he has not had his trust in God.

It was true on the day of his birth, it is true on the day of his death. So that even while being forsaken by God, do you hear the faith in verse 1?

My God. My God. As he looks down at those who fervently oppose him, he looks up and knows that God has forever been for his good.

In the midst of the greatest suffering, he never lets go of that truth. As he's surrounded by his enemies, as those who seek to devour him encroach upon him, he again, verse 20, cries out to God for help.

He continues to cry out to God for help. Even when he feels like, verse 2, he does not hear. Nevertheless, he cries out for deliverance.

[18:42] Deliverance from the dogs, rescue from the bulls, salvation from the lion. I think that is a really important insight into what Christ and his humanity longed for in those moments.

The same prayer we hear in Gethsemane, isn't it? Lord, please take this cup from me. Yet not my will, but your be done. As Christ was hanging on the cross, the pain he was suffering left him with no choice but to cry out for salvation, for rescue.

But all the while, the prayer of Gethsemane remains. Yet not my will, but yours. So that as long as there was no other way, this is what he was ready, willing to endure for our sake.

It was immense suffering, but that suffering was never separated from a secure and steadfast faith. As God forsook him, he still knew he was his God.

As his enemies humiliated him, he knew that those who trusted God would not in the end be put to shame. As he was encircled by enemies with no hope of escape, he knew that God still heard his pleas, and he trusted that God would do what was right.

[20:13] As he endured the curse of God, he never doubted the faithfulness of God. My God, my God.

As you hear his suffering, hear also his faith. Not suffering then faith, but suffering and faith. They are both and always present for Christ every moment on the cross of Calvary.

But that is not where this psalm ends, is it? In the last few verses, we hear of Christ's great hope, of his confidence that all he's enduring in this moment will result in eternal goods.

Hear his suffering, hear his faith, and hear his hope, because the suffering servant knows that his suffering is not the end. Because as the man on the cross takes Psalm 22 upon his lips, he is declaring from the midst of his sorrow that there is a day coming when he will lead the congregation of God in praise.

because he knows God will not abandon his soul to death. Verse 24, he has not abhorred the affliction of the afflicted.

[21:42] He has not hidden his face from him. Listen to the confidence of verse 22, I will tell of your name to my brothers. Why?

So that those who seek the suffering king shall praise the Lord. Verse 26, that their hearts will live forever.

That is the hope that Christ knew was waiting on the other side of the cross. That God would once more shine his face upon him and that through him, through the suffering of one man, many would have life.

as Christ calls out those famous words, Eloi, Eloi, lemma sabachthani, it should deepen our sense of his suffering, but it should also shine a light on his confidence, his faith, his sure and certain hope.

the man on the cross was not a helpless victim who deserves our pity every Good Friday. He was a faithful savior who deserves our worship.

[23:02] Not our pity, but our praise that he willingly endured these infinite depths of suffering, knowing, knowing, that through this faithful suffering, a great congregation, a great multitude of people would be blessed.

That the curse which humanity borne from the fall would be undone in him so that with our faith and trust in him, we never again need to fear God's curse.

We will never have to worry about God forsaking us. We never need to sing the opening lines of Psalm 22 as though they were our words because Christ has sung them for us. Instead, we can be confident that we will not ultimately be put to shame but instead will stand with a great multitude, be led by Christ himself in worship of the one who sits on the throne. Christ endured the deepest depths of suffering, confident that this is what lay on the other side of the grave. Verse 27, that all the ends of the earth might turn to God, all the families of the nation praising the Lord.

[24:28] Having the curse undone, having received every spiritual blessing in Christ, knowing life in his name, that is the hope Christ set before him as he hung there in agony, not for his good but for our good.

And that is the good news we remember and make known every good Friday. I don't know if you noticed there, verse 30. Have you noticed the fulfillment in these words?

See how the confidence of Christ was well placed. Hear how his hope was the one that was sure and certain. Verse 30, because of his faithful suffering, posterity shall serve him.

And it shall be told to the coming generation, they shall proclaim his righteousness to a people that at that time were yet unborn. As we come here this evening to worship him into this building at half past seven at the end of a working week, what is happening?

what is happening? As Christ suffered on the cross, he did so knowing that we would be here tonight with life because of him coming to praise God in his name.

[26:03] As Jesus hung on the cross, this was his great hope. that we, the future generations, together with our brothers and sisters from every nation across the world, would gather together as a worldwide congregation and proclaim that he has done it.

That it is finished. The curse undone, blessing received, life assured, worship guaranteed. all because he suffered faithfully on the cross of Calvary.

Suffering that we will never truly know the depths of, faith which runs even deeper, for a sure and certain hope that we, this evening, get to be part of.

That is the voice of Christ on the cross. that is the hope he is holding on to in the midst of his anguish.

That we, generations and nations later, those of us sitting here 2,000 years on, 2,000 miles away, would come and put our faith and trust in him that we might serve him and worship him and have life in his name and make that known to all peoples everywhere at all times, that he has done it.

[27:37] And he's done it for you. If you have your faith and trust in Jesus Christ this evening, that is the wonderful, sure and certain hope you have, that you do not need to suffer as he did because he has done it, that you can have the life he has simply by coming to him in faith.

That was a glorious truth that we can rest in this Good Friday and we get to look forward to a glorious hope in a couple of days' time as we come together on resurrection Sunday and know that the life we have in him we have forever.

As we place our faith and trust in Jesus, as we look forward to that day, let us pray together that we would hold firm to him as he held firm in his faith for God.

Let us pray. Father, we do thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Lamb who was slain, who endured depths of sorrow and suffering that we can never comprehend, that he endured it all for our sake, that he bore the unbearable curse, so that we might be set free from the bonds of sin and death and live unto Christ forever.

We praise you for Christ's faithfulness, for his unshakable faith, even in the face of overwhelming foes, that although in his humanity he was enduring pain, we cannot fathom, not for a moment did his trust in you falter or fade.

[29:21] And we praise you for the purpose for which he died, that all people would be blessed in him, that people from every nation and every generation, even us here, thousands of miles away, thousands of years later, can come and have life in his name.

drawn from the dust of death and lavished instead with every spiritual blessing. So fill our hearts with thankfulness, cause praise to flow out from us, and as we look forward to this coming Sunday, may we rejoice all the more that the Saviour we worship did not remain in the grave, but burst forth

in victory forever.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.