

The Center of History

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[0:00] What is the most pivotal moment in history? How you answer that question says a lot about what you think is most important. If you say the American or the French Revolution, then you probably think politics is the most important thing.

If you say maybe the invention of the printing press or the Enlightenment, then you would say that history is this progress of ideas, of how ideas change over time.

The ancient Greeks didn't like questions like that because they thought history just went in circles. It was one thing after another and the same things happened over and over again.

It was just something else in this circle of life. But that can't be. That can't be.

Because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for the forgiveness of sins. And the Son of God, by His very nature, can only die once for sins.

[1:10] For the forgiveness of sins. Because if He dies for them, then they are forgiven. They're done with. No one can bring them back.

It's a one-time, unrepeatable event. And that means that there's such a thing as history. That there's a beginning.

And there's an end. And there's a middle. And the cross of Christ stands at the middle of history. It's in the exact middle of God's calendar.

It's the point on which everything turns. And that's not just me saying that. That's what the Bible teaches. So, I would invite you to look at Hebrews chapter 9.

Hebrews chapter 9. I want to begin reading at verse 23. And read through the end of the chapter. Hebrews 9.23.

[2:14] Hebrews 9.23.

Then, Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. And He will appear a second time.

Not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. So, Jesus' death was once for all.

Good Friday is the pivot on which history swings on. Every day before that was coming up to that day. And every day since that day has been from that day.

[3:42] Stemming from it. And so, Jesus suffered once for all. And that changed everything. It changed history. It changed everything about what was happening in God's world.

And so, tonight I want to just meditate on that. Jesus' suffering and what it accomplished. So, verse 26 says that Jesus suffered.

If He was like every other priest, He would have had to suffer many times, but He suffered once. And He suffered in a unique, one-time way.

And so, I want to ask, what did Christ suffer? What did Christ suffer? He suffered externally, physically, where everyone could see that kind of suffering.

But He also suffered spiritually in a way that no one could see. That only the Trinity could understand. And so, we want to think about both sides of those.

[4:50] So, let's first think about His external, physical suffering. On the cross, Jesus suffered pain. The Bible doesn't explain crucifixion.

In a few words, the writers say simply, they crucified Him. The writers don't say much about it, not because they're embarrassed of it.

And not because they're afraid of shocking our sensibilities. But it was common. It was something common.

Everyone knew about it. Jesus Himself was crucified with two thieves, these two brigands. They're probably sort of like Robin Hood characters. They lived on the edge of society. They created chaos. They spurned authority. And they were crucified as meaningless, rebellious bits of society. When King Herod died, the Roman governor in charge crucified 2,000 Jews to stop a rebellion.

[5:59] Crucifixion was cruel. It was not unusual. And the New Testament writers don't go on at great length about what was involved, because everyone knew what was involved.

So, crucifixion, it was the most painful, a most painful death. And the pain began long before the nails did. Roman soldiers whipped our Lord until His back and His legs were nothing but a bloody, pulpy mess.

And most men died before they got through the flogging. The Jews said, you can only flog 39 times, and the Romans had no rules. So, most men didn't even make it to the cross.

Well, after the flogging, He carried His cross to the execution site. And then the victim was stripped naked. He was laid down on the piece of wood.

And then the soldiers drove three to five inch nails into His wrists and into His ankles. And then Jesus was then hoisted up.

[7:10] And with a drop and a jerk, the cross fell into a hole. And so with a jerk, His arms flew up. And as His arms flew up, all the weight of His whole body came down on His wrists and on His ankles and on the nails.

And as His arms were up, He could breathe. But He found that He couldn't breathe out. He could breathe in. He could take a deep breath, but He couldn't breathe out.

And so despite the pain, the victim had to pull himself up, force himself up. And so His bleeding legs and His back were just scraped up against the wood.

Every single time, He just wanted to breathe. And so only when He was holding Himself up could He speak. That was the only time He could exhale.

And so that's why Jesus' seven words on the cross are so brief. Because it was just one breath.

And so as the hours passed, His muscles began to cramp with dehydration.

[8:18] But up and down He went. More painful each time. And the situation was coming to a very slow, but swift close. Until He said, finally, I thirst.

And then with the final lift, He gave His final breath, His last words, and He died. And the cross was agony. But the cross was the most humiliating death possible.

The cross was painful, but that's not where the sting of the cross was for the person. It was how it treated a person.

The victim was hung naked for everyone to see. And so part of the mockery that was involved with crucifixion was the guards and people watching and making fun of the victim.

And no doubt there were the worst kinds of dirty jokes and horrific insults hurled at the person. At Christ. And so the cross left a person without any dignity at all.

[9:30] He was treated like an animal. He was hung up like a piece of meat. And He was hung up for everyone to see. As if to say, the Romans said by this, This is what will happen to you if you cross us.

We will not just kill you. We will destroy you. There will be nothing left of you. There will be no death with dignity. There will be no proud last words. There will be no valiant last stand.

There is only going to be humiliation. There is only going to be absolute misery. And our Lord suffered the worst kind of humiliation.

And that's why Paul, when talking about the humility of Christ, He says with shock, in Philippians 2, He humbled Himself to death, even death of a cross.

It blew Paul's mind when he thought about the Son of God humbling Himself to die, and just to die, but to die on a cross. It was almost impossible to conceive.

[10:36] Heaven and the cross were almost too far apart. How could they ever be put together? And yet Jesus traveled that distance. He came down, and He went from heaven to a cross, from the ultimate honor to ultimate humiliation.

And the cross was painful. And it was shameful. And it was lonely. The whole thing was calculated to utterly remove the victim from any chance of having any compassion from his friends.

Have you ever been in a situation where someone is so hurt, the pain is so deep, that you cannot even begin to sympathize with them?

You can't even imagine how they are feeling. You don't even know how to begin to get where they are. You're just stunned by the pain.

Well, that was what the cross was. I think the saddest words, some of the saddest words in the whole Bible come in Luke 23, 49. But all those who knew Him, including the women who had followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching these things.

[12 : 04] So what did our beautiful Lord see when He looked out? Well, He saw His disciples scattered. And He probably already knew Judas is hanging and out in a field somewhere dead.

And the women who used to take care of Him, His close friends, are all standing at a distance completely helpless. And so He was alone.

What could they do? What could they say? They couldn't say, oh, it's going to be okay now because there was nothing left there except for pain and humiliation and loneliness.

He was totally cut off from compassion, from His friends, from His disciples. So that was the cross. But brothers and sisters, that only begins to answer the question, what did Jesus suffer? Because that was not a one-time event.

[13 : 12] As terrible as all that was, that was not unusual. Lots of people suffered that way. And so there was more going on on that middle cross than nails and laughing and blood.

Our Lord was a strong, brave man. And in the Garden of Gethsemane, He wasn't weeping tears of blood because He was afraid to die.

He wasn't weeping tears of blood because He was afraid of physical pain. Because He was doing that because He knew that joined all that physical agony was a cup.

the cup of God's wrath for all His people. And so Jesus did not only suffer externally for all to see, but He suffered spiritually.

And this is like the Holy of Holies. This is all shrouded in mystery. The sun refused to shine. The lights went out when the cup of God's wrath was being poured out on His own sun.

[14 : 24] And so we can't know what happened. It's beyond our ability to understand. And I think we will only begin to slightly start to understand when we've looked out on hell and we've seen souls suffering forever and ever.

Will we be able to understand what was going on on Good Friday? today. But I do think that God chose the cross to help us.

He chose for His Son to die on a cross to help us to begin to understand what He suffered internally. Jesus could have been beheaded.

He could have been shot, poisoned. He could have been executed in a hundred different ways. But it was the cross. Because only the cross could come close to being a good picture, a good analogy of what our Lord was suffering spiritually.

And so He suffered pain. Our God is a consuming fire. The Bible describes His wrath as burning against sin.

[15 : 41] And on Sodom and Gomorrah His wrath fell and the city was burned and buried. The fire on every altar says that God's wrath is fire. And God's wrath came to Jesus on that day.

That fire came to Him. And so our Lord knew that pain was coming and that's why it shook Him to the core in the garden.

And He was weeping tears of blood at just the thought of that coming to Him. God made Him pay for every single one of your sins and every single one of my sins of all of His people's sins.

For your sins, for my sins. And so the deepest stroke that He felt was the one that justice gave.

See, every sin was felt. Every sin was purged in the fires of God's wrath and Jesus felt it all.

And so He was caught in the winepress of God's anger and He was trodden down. And Jesus suffered humiliation.

[16 : 59] For the first time ever, Jesus, the Son of God, could not stand in His Father's presence and His Father smile at Him. For the first time, God looked upon His own Son and saw nothing but sin.

And for the very first time ever, Jesus looked upon Himself and He wasn't spotless anymore. Our sins were upon Him. Every shameful thing that we did was clinging to Him.

And so there was shame on the cross. There wasn't just this physical nakedness. There was the spiritual nakedness. He was exposed and our sins were upon Him and He was counted guilty and He was found out.

And the shame that we deserved, He was suffering and He suffered. And Jesus suffered loneliness. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

me? How deep did that breaking go that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, would be abandoned, would scream in agony, why have you forsaken me?

[18:16] Why have you left me? The people were far away. His disciples were at a distance, but worst of all, His Father was at a distance. His Father stood far off.

And so what happened there was a mystery. The lonely agony of hell came to the cross and our beautiful Lord suffered.

Well, what did Jesus suffer? Physical, spiritual pain, spiritual humiliation, loneliness, happiness. Now, why?

Why did Christ suffer? Well, you see the answers in Hebrews 9. First one, look at verse 26. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world, but now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

You see it there. Why did Jesus suffer such humiliation and such pain and such loneliness to do away with sin? He suffered to do away with, to annul, to put it away, to put it in the past.

[19:42] The author of the Hebrews uses this one other time in Hebrews 7 when he's talking about the changing of the priesthood from the order of Aaron to the order of Melchizedek. He says, the former regulation, the whole order of doing things with the Aaron, the Aaronic priesthood, the former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless.

And so when Jesus came, the old time of Aaron being the priest came to an end. It was put in the past. It was set aside. It was done away with. And so why did Jesus suffer?

To do away with sin, to put it in the past, to set it aside. And he isn't talking about sin in particular here. You notice he uses just the singular sin. He's talking about sin absolutely, sin cosmically as a ruling power, as a principle that enslaves people.

And so remember, from the time of Adam, sin reigned, death reigned through sin, and everyone was under the power of sin and death. But in suffering, Jesus broke the power of sin.

He broke sin's power, he broke sin's reign. And so he conquered sin and he rescued you, he rescued you from the condemnation of sin.

[21:04] He put its power in the past, so to speak. And that's why there's no condemnation for you. That's why you've been justified. Sin's power is guilt.

And Jesus paid the price. And so you're free. Now sin as a principle, as a rule in his people's life, was done away with.

He destroyed sin's hold on us. And that was God's beautiful and wonderful gift to humanity. That was God's gift to all who would believe.

Christ appeared and he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. So he was the priest, and he was the sacrifice. And in his suffering, he changed everything.

At the very end of the ages, it says, he came. Well, why is it at the very end of the ages? Because when he comes, those ages are past. He changed everything.

[22:07] So why can you walk in newness of life? why aren't you still a slave to sin? Why aren't you in some gutter somewhere?

Why aren't you married to someone totally different in your life, a total miserable wreck? Well, because he suffered. Because at the cross, he defeated sin's power.

Well, we see another reason why Jesus suffered in verse 28. So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.

Now, this is different than verse 26. You notice the author is now talking about sins in the plural. He's not talking about sin cosmically as a principle, as a power, but he's talking about each and every one of your sins if you are in Christ.

Your sins. Well, why did Christ suffer? Why did he go through such pain and agony? Why did he bear the wrath of God?

[23:16] It was to take away sin. The word means to bear, to sustain, to take upon himself. And so that's what he did.

All of our sins he took upon himself. Every one of your sinful thoughts, he took it on himself. Every one of your sinful attitudes and sinful actions, Jesus died to carry them away.

And the picture is from Leviticus 16, the day of atonement. There were two goats. You remember the second goat, the priest laid his hands on that second goat.

And as he laid his hands, it symbolized the transfer of guilt, the transfer of sin onto that goat. And then that goat was sent away into the wilderness, never to be seen again.

So the goat bore the sins away. And so Jesus suffered to do that for you. He suffered to take your sins away. He took them to the place of judgment.

[24:20] He took them into the fires of God's wrath. And in doing so, he took them far away. And so as far as the east is from the west, so far has he taken our sins, has he removed our sins from us.

And so can God, will God ever bring your sins up against you in judgment? Will he ever bring them up against us in judgment?

No. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So my guilty soul is counted free. I'm considered justified. And so his suffering broke sin's rule in my life and his suffering took away your sins forever and ever.

So history has a problem. And it's man's sin. And at the pivot point of all of history, God changed everything.

He turned everything around for those who would repent and believe. Everything that we needed done, Jesus did. everything that we could never have done, Jesus did for us.

[25:37] And so we're here tonight to remember what Jesus suffered out of love for us. He did all these things. He suffered all these things because we had a problem that we couldn't solve.

And so he suffered and solved it for us. we're here to remember that by his wounds we are healed. But where is all this going? Where is all this going? This isn't the end of the story. We only remember his death until he comes.

And brothers and sisters, Hebrews 9 ends with him coming and coming again not to bear sin but to bring salvation. So sin has been dealt with and when he comes it's going to be finished.

So the cross is the pivot point of history but it is not the culmination of history. This is not where history is going. Where everything is going, where I am going and where you are going, where the whole world is going, where we're all rushing to, is that day when Christ returns and he brings salvation for all those who are waiting for him.

[26:54] And so tonight only one thing matters. Are you in Christ? Did Christ die for you?

Are you waiting for him? And if that's not true of you, don't reject him any longer.

His death was enough for your sins. His suffering was enough. His humiliation, his loneliness, his pain was enough to pay for all of your sins so you don't have to try to save yourself.

Because he has done enough. And so all there is to do is to go to him.

There is only one Savior. And he has done what needs to be done. And so go to him. Talk to him. Ask him for forgiveness.

[28:02] Ask him for mercy. Ask him to save you. And you will be saved. And brothers and sisters, let's love and worship our beautiful Savior tonight.

For what he suffered for us. He wore the nails for us. So let us love him.